

Wild

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the slow way

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Makarora to
the sea

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Island**

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**walking the
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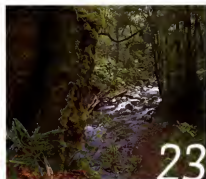
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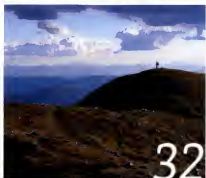
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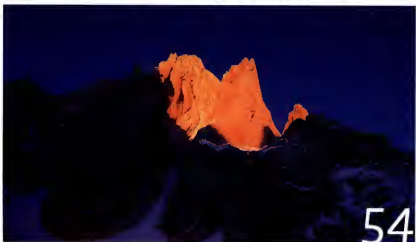
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Wild
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WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



Cover Mayan Gobat-Smith bivvying at the edge of Kaipo Wall in New Zealand's Darran Mountains.

Derek Thotcher

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Families: you gotta love 'em

Reflecting on the bush and families

Managing Director, Advertising & Marketing
Stephen Hamilton

advertising@wild.com.au

Associate Editor Ross Taylor

editorial@wild.com.au

Administrative & Editorial Coordinator

Mathew Farrell

editorialadmin@wild.com.au

Sub-editors Mary Harber, Nick Tapp

Subscriptions Tony Cox

mailorder@wild.com.au

Accounts Carolyn Leach

accounts@wild.com.au

Design & Production Bruce Godden

production@wild.com.au

Consultant Brian Walters SC

Special Advisers

Stephen Bunton, John Chapman, Andrew Cox, Grant

Dixon, Geoff Law, Roger Lembit, David Noble

Founder Chris Baxter OAM

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All correspondence to:

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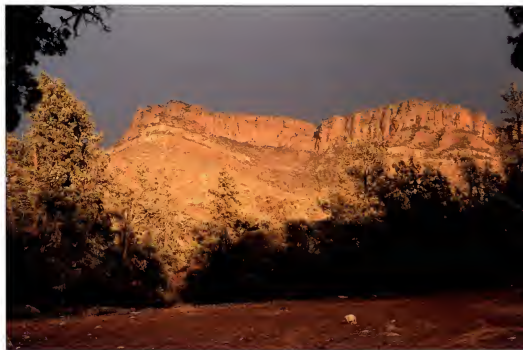
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The cliffs lining the edge of Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Ranges lit up during a dust storm. Ross Taylor

FOR MANY OF US OUR FIRST EXPERIENCE OF the great outdoors is with our families. My own mother carried me many hundreds of kilometres through the Sierras at the age of two. Apparently, when I got bored, I found it very entertaining to tear her hat off and throw it on the ground. For some reason Mum didn't find having to bend over repeatedly and pick it up quite as amusing. As our family grew from just one child to five, our always ambitious outdoors adventures took on a more epic quality. Trips to Tassie seemed to herald days of endless rain or snowstorms (or us all coming down with chicken pox, as we did on one occasion), and my parents learned that you can never carry enough food when you have five ravenous children. Despite my regular complaints and an early love/hate relationship with camping, many of my favourite memories are from those trips: my sister mistaking a bottle of methylated spirits for water (my old man got into trouble for that one), swimming in the Snowy River one hot, dry summer, or tucked up in a tent, my parents still out by the fire, the low murmur of their voices lulling me to sleep.

In this issue of Wild, Arctic explorer and guide Eric Philips walks the popular Overland Track with his ten-year-old daughter Mardi. While the Overland is not exactly superadventurous for an Arctic explorer, it is for Mardi, and you can tell that for Eric everything is new again through the eyes of his daughter. The human capacity for wonder is never purer than when we are young. Mardi will never be ten again (and ten is a sweet age compared with the teenage years). The age is as transitory as time itself. No doubt the memory of that trip will be tucked

away in a special place in Eric's mind. More recently I ran (and walked) the Overland Track with my younger brother James and my father Rob. Dad is 67 and this year's Cradle Run was his tenth and possibly his last. Knowing that, I made a special effort to get fit, and it was worth it. I don't think I have ever seen my father so nervous or so open as those moments before we all set off in the early morning, and watching him skip over the finish line 13 hours and 2 minutes later was also pretty special. It is Dad who is probably most responsible for my own love of the outdoors, and I hope we will have many more adventures together.

Which brings me to the point of all this reminiscing. To me, a love of the outdoors is one of the most valuable gifts parents can pass on to their children. For most of us, our lives are confined to cities, and life in cities seems to be increasingly defined by consumerism and divorced from nature. Getting into the outdoors provides an escape, a return to a more basic existence (and all the other clichés), a space that is free from branding and messages telling you to spend, spend, spend. And, best of all, it is still reasonably cheap. Camping can be done with the simplest of gear. Some of my most unforgettable memories are of nights out without a tent or a sleeping bag, sleeping in caves or under bushes, subsisting on not very much. My first night snow-camping was somewhat marred by a 30-year-old Paddy Pallin sleeping bag that only came about halfway up my chest and a three-quarter length foam mat—but I remember that night vividly (nearly every minute of it in fact). These days I sleep a lot more comfortably

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using gear worth about the same amount as a small, second-hand car, but am I having more fun? (Well, I am certainly sleeping better.)

Most importantly, getting outdoors provides a backdrop for connection between family members and friends that is free from the distractions of iPods, mobile phones, televisions, work—the list is increasingly endless. There are also more subtle things that the outdoors provides; simple things, like seeing the stars more vividly or being more exposed to the elements—rain, dust, wind, silence. Recently I was in the Flinders Ranges and we had a bit of all that, except rain of course (I have never seen rain in the Flinders). One day brought mighty dust storms. Another day it was so calm that the silence was only broken by the sounds of ravens cawing as they soared on the updrafts. At night the stars were so vivid they seemed to burn.

People who are not taken into the outdoors from an early age seem disadvantaged to me. To them the bush is an alien landscape, full of creepy-crawly, prickles and snakes, rather than a place of wonder. They don't seem to notice the small, amazing things of which the Australian bush is full. The extent of their experience is the trip from their car down a tourist road to view mountain, waterfall or piece of rock art. The greatest gift to your children is to let them roam free in the bush: to absorb the space, to explore, to get dirty, to climb trees, to build dams in creeks, to eat damper (with equal portions of flour and charcoal), drink metho (optional) and generally have a fantastic time.

Wild has always been driven by a strong love of the outdoors, not only as a place of recreation and retreat, but also as a place which must be defended against the ever-expanding, all-devouring spread of human activity. Every editor of *Wild* has brought their own vision of the magazine and love of the outdoors, while trying to stay true to the core values of the magazine—and I hope to do the same. It doesn't seem so long ago that I was a kid reading old, well-thumbed back issues of *Wild* and today I am writing my first editorial. I am looking forward to writing more of them. 

Ross Taylor

editorial@wild.com.au

Staff arrivals and departures

With Megan leaving us to visit the wilds of Africa, the ruggedly handsome Mathew Farrell has now taken over the position of Administrative and Editorial Coordinator. Mat is a very keen mountaineer, climber, walker, mountain biker and professional photographer, so he brings a wealth of outdoors experience to the job. You can check out some of his amazing photos in our mountaineering special.

The Wild readership survey

If you've ever thought about sending us praise, criticism (heaven forbid), or constructive feedback about the magazine, here's your chance. The survey is now online and only takes a few minutes to fill out. Not only will you be contributing to *Wild*'s ongoing improvements, but you will also be in the running to win some fantastic prizes. Go to www.wild.co.au/wildsurvey/ to have your say on the future direction of *Wild*.

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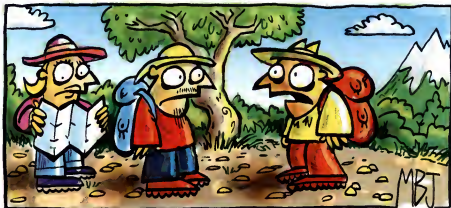
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BIG is beautiful

The peak bagging and group numbers debate continues

GRANT DIXON (WILDFIRE, WILD NO 108) is critical of the trip I led with 14 people to Provis Hills early last December. He has written this public letter without contacting me to find out about the trip and what we did. From his comments it appears that he hasn't even read the extensive trip review published in *The Walker* (magazine of the North West Walking Club). I had similar comments from another regular *Wild* contributor who also favours solo trips to such places, but he was much less critical once we discussed it. I liked David Schoemaker's excellent letter on the next page poking fun at those writing articles about secret places that they don't want to tell us about, but they do want to brag to us they have been there, as if to say: 'Look where I've been, and you can't get there because you don't know where it is and I won't tell you!' This seems to be in the mistaken belief that if they do tell, everyone will want to go there. The reality is, and both the proprietors of outdoors shops and the park rangers in Tasmania will verify this, less and less people are going off track, and very few are going to very scrubby, remote areas. So is it better to take 14 people to somewhere no one else is, and very few people have been, or to take the same number on popular tracks like the Overland Track where campsites and huts might be full? It is generally considered unsafe for less than four walkers in a party to go to a remote area. To go into an area with thick scrub, rivers that regularly flood, and peaks prone to blizzards and gale force winds, requiring plane access needs careful thought to safety, and there is certainly safety in numbers. I am not sure if Martin Hawes enjoyed his 24-day solo scrub bash to Provis Hills (*Wild* no 107), but I wondered if his relatives enjoyed the thought of him out there solo and uncommunicative (perhaps they are used to it!). By taking 14 people the scrub bashing was easy and the trip was very enjoyable. I'll bet you won't find our route or campsites if you went there. For the record, we flew in as three separate groups and the only night we all camped together on the South Coast Track was Louisa River western side, which is rarely used, leaving the large, spacious campsite on the eastern bank free for track walkers. We camped two nights spread out on the extensive alpine plateau under Mt Louisa, not leaving any trace, and two nights on button grass in the upper Solly river valley. We flattened some button grass but it grows quickly and, as stated elsewhere in the last issue of *Wild*, burns easily and increasingly frequently. Our bashed pad through the scrubby areas was mostly following an existing bashed taped route with small cut campsites, so a party of two appears already to have done the work... By contrast, at Easter I did a solo day walk traversing the Walls of Jerusalem in a big arc. I encountered numerous parties, some large, with all legal and some illegal campsites full. I don't



"I'm against Peak Bagging, let's go nowhere in particular..."

think it would have been good to take a large party there at a popular time.

Dr Philip Dawson
George Town, Tasmania

I can't believe that anyone goes walking without wanting to tick the summit. Bushwalking is what you do to get to the good stuff; canyons, caves and climbs! Should I now remove that walking boot from my mouth, so as to insert my tongue firmly into my cheek?

Stephen Bunton
Mt Stuart, Tasmania

High tide lines on Bowen Island

The article about kayaking in Jervis Bay (by John Wilde, *Wild* no 106) certainly well described the fantastic opportunity to enjoy the beautiful and (mostly) calm waters of the Bay. However, I'd like to clarify that the Bowen Island Special Purpose Zone includes the whole island and the waters on the western side of the island out to 30 metres from the mean high tide mark. The zone aims to protect nesting seabirds and their habitat from disturbance. Public access is prohibited on Bowen Island and within the waters 30 metres to the west of the island. More information about Boodeeree National Park and Bowen Island can be found at www.boodeeree.gov.au.

Scott Surridge
Park Manager, Boodeeree National Park

Warning for snow whites

Quentin Chester's article in *Wild* no 108 will hopefully have given the snow whites among his readers cause to have serious second thoughts about venturing outdoors without proper and adequate skin protection. Having lost a good mate to a melanoma that turned 'ugly', a son that suffers from vitiligo and my own ongoing treatment for basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas, I feel that Quentin's article should be mandatory reading for all who are unfortunate enough to have skin that turns as 'red as a pomegranate' whenever you go outside. The need to afford adequate protection for the fore-

arms is made difficult, especially during summer, by the very limited range of lightweight long sleeve shirts carried by the leading outdoors equipment suppliers. Short sleeves are the go if you are eager to follow the current fashion trends, are of stout ANZAC stock and have little concern for your future health. You can roll the sleeves up if the look is that important! Skin cancer is a part of outdoors life in Australia—don't choose to ignore it and think it can't happen to me!

Barrington Ogden
Wanniansa, ACT

Huts: is there a better way?

During 30 years of bushwalking throughout Australia I have visited many huts. With few exceptions, these huts are in poor to fair condition. They are generally old, in need of repair and dark and dusty. They lack hygienic toilet facilities and convenient water facilities to wash your hands, dishes and extinguish a fire. Often the water source is a nearby creek. I would classify many of these huts as emergency shelters, not comfortable places to cook and sleep. This has never worried me in the past as I had the philosophy that bushwalkers needed to be independent, self-sufficient and should not rely on huts. However, a trip to New Zealand last year changed my views.

New Zealand has over 950 well-maintained huts. The worst of the huts I saw in New Zealand are better than the best in Australia. The huts I visited in New Zealand are superior because they have good mattresses, clean toilets (some have flush toilets), tap water inside and outside for cooking and washing, gas cookers on the popular walks and are in near new condition. From a safety perspective, the ranger is on site at popular locations. If no ranger is present, there is a two-way radio in the huts. The tracks are better signposted and maintained. Detailed information about the track, weather forecast and warnings are in each hut.

What struck me when tramping in New Zealand was that most walkers were not from New

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Zealand or Australia. In Australia, however, it is rare to see a non-Australian on a bushwalk. This has a lot to do with New Zealand's positive attitude to bushwalkers and backpackers. Australia could learn a lot from how New Zealand promotes its country to bushwalkers and backpackers. Better huts would require substantial funding. However, more people visiting our great national parks in a healthier and safer environment is surely a good thing.

David Charles
Newtown, Victoria

A question of weight

When buying a tent for hiking an important consideration is the weight of the tent. A heavy tent can turn an enjoyable trip into a slog. I purchased a tent today and the manufacturer claimed it weighed 3.2 kilograms. It was a bit heavier than I really wanted but it was roomier than the other model I looked at so I purchased it. Imagine my dismay when I got home and weighed it and it was 3.5 kilograms, significantly more than the manufacturer claimed. Why do manufacturers make claims that are not correct? Reputable manufacturers (the brand I bought was well known) should do their best to ensure the information they provide to their customers is as accurate as possible. When Wild magazine does a tent survey, do you check the weight of the tent against what the manufacturer states in their advertising material? How many other items that we buy are not what the manufacturer claims them to be?

Peter Ryan
Berwick, Victoria

Our most recent tent survey (Wild no 108), by John Chapman, outlines the reasons why there can occasionally be disparities between the listed and actual weight of tents; it also states that all weights are supplied by the manufacturers (we don't check them ourselves). Associate editor

Firstly, thanks for putting together such a useful support tool in the form of Wild magazine. We have used it many times to help research and get advice about new purchases and tips and ideas for our trips. I'm wondering if you might be featuring an article on food for hiking trips: what is good and easy to take, etc. This always seems to be an issue when preparing to go away due to being fussy eaters (I won't eat canned fish and my partner gets bored eating pasta all the time). I'm looking for something new and interesting to take that won't weigh a ton or require a gourmet kitchen to prepare. What are some of the tips that you and the readers out there can offer?

Bianca Topp
Currumbin, Queensland

It has been some time since we published an article on food for the bush, and we are keen to run something again soon—anyone? We have run a few articles in the past that may be helpful, including an excellent one by Monica Chapman called *Dry Your Own Food* (Wild no 66). You can also search the online Wild index using the word 'food'. Associate editor

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email editorial@wild.com.au

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Photo: John Laptad



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Dorothy 'Dot' Butler, bushwalker, mountaineer and conservationist

Anne McLeod remembers the legendary walker, who died recently at the age of 96

Dot Butler bushwalked, climbed and bicycled across the world; from Europe to the Andes, from New Zealand to Cambodia. With the build of a Sherpa, Dot had a natural ability and inclination for any adventurous activity. Her first climb at the age of 25 was also her most memorable and began a love affair with mountains that lasted her lifetime.

Dot climbing in bare feet, and Dr Eric Dark (President of the Blue Mountains Climbing Club, which was facetiously known as the Katoomba Suicide Club due to the perilous climbs members made on the sheer escarpments of the Blue Mountains) roped together to be the first people to make the dangerous ascent of Crater Bluff, the highest peak in the Warrumbungles in north-western New South Wales. While others of the party dropped out through the discretion of age, Dot was undaunted. After a life-and-death ascent, the pair reached the summit sharing a view that no others had seen before—a dozen or so magnificent, rugged peaks arose out of the huge, hollow crater. Impressed by the unique but rarely visited area, the party enthusiastically persuaded the local farmer who held the lease that it should be reserved for public recreation. When Dot and friends returned to Sydney, a proposal to the Lands Department was soon made and eventually, in the 1950s, an area of 3360 hectares was finally withdrawn from the Crown Lease and reserved as the Warrumbungles National Park. Administered since 1967 by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the park receives between 50 000 and 85 000 visitors annually.

Fascinated by mountaineering, she travelled to climb New Zealand's highest peak, Mt Cook (3754 metres). In following years Dot would return for six weeks every Christmas to climb and work as a guide. After marrying and having four children, Dot renewed her love affair with mountains in the 1950s when she established an Australian section of the New Zealand Alpine Club. She had become concerned about the number of Australians falling into crevasses in the alpine regions of New Zealand. For 25 years she trained prospective climbers in basic safety skills.

Butler led her first international expedition to the Andes in 1969. The Australian team climbed 27 peaks, mostly over 5500 metres. After the Peru earthquake of 1970, members of the Andean expedition established a relief fund to help the people who had helped them.

Dot Butler had the classic Australian childhood with her five brothers and sisters, climbing trees and rowing through the bushlands until dark when they would troop home for dinner. Few girls continued on at school after the age

of 14, but Dot qualified for the selective Sydney Girls High School, where she was a bright student who excelled at sports. Leaving school just as the Depression hit, she learned typing and worked in a number of clerical jobs, saving enough money to go on her first solo adventure by bicycle around Tasmania. The fortnight's tour was the first of many she made to the island.

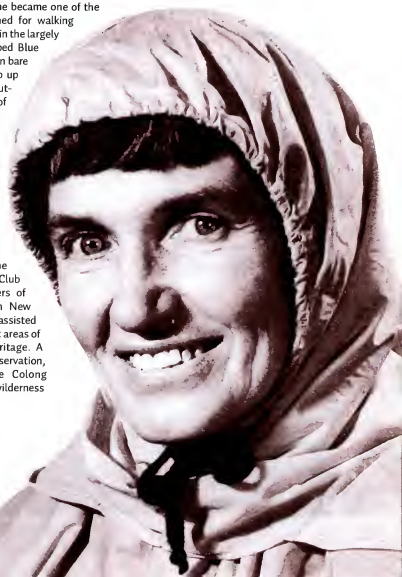
One weekend in 1931, Dot set out on a camping trip with a sedate group to Era Beach south of the Royal National Park when she was surprised, but excited, to see a group of cavorting nude swimmers. They looked like her kind and when she joined them around their campfire that night she learned that they were members of the Sydney Bushwalker's Club. It was a meeting that shaped her future life. She immediately joined the club and threw herself into bushwalking, heading off every weekend on camping trips carrying a rucksack made from a pillowcase stuffed with the blanket off her bed and the bare necessities. She became one of the 'tiger walkers', renowned for walking long distances at speed in the largely untracked and unmapped Blue Mountains. Dot, always in bare feet, would run to keep up with the pace of these outstandingly fit men, one of whom held most of Australia's marathon cross-country walking records. Even into her sixties Dot could outrun most of the younger competitors in orienteering events.

The twin themes of Dot's life were outdoor adventure and environmental protection. The Sydney Bushwalker's Club members were pioneers of nature conservation in New South Wales, and Dot assisted their efforts to save vast areas of the state's natural heritage. A tireless supporter of conservation, she worked with the Colong Foundation (the oldest wilderness

society in Australia) in the Save the Rainforest Campaign and the creation of the Blue Mountains National Park. She campaigned to save Lake Pedder, the Daintree, Kakadu and the Myall Lakes National Park.

Remaining active into her eighties, Butler was *Australian Geographic's* 'Adventurer of the Year' in 1988, and became a poster girl for Seniors Week when she climbed and abseiled down the Sydney Harbour Bridge at the age of eighty. While Dot hardly even stubbed a toe throughout her years of extreme bushwalking and mountaineering, her children suffered a different fate. Three out of four died at the hand of nature's forces. Wendy drowned in the Kowmung River in the Blue Mountains, Norman died from snakebite in Nimbin and his twin Wade disappeared while bushwalking in the South-west of Tasmania. She is survived by her daughter Rona Iluna. (Dot is profiled in *Wild* no 36.)

Dot Butler 1911–2008.
Butler collection



Mera Peak the trekker's Everest, photo © Chessell



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Photo: Duncan Henderson

Three Peaks down to the wire

Holly Ranson reports on the great race

After 100 kilometres of running and 335 nautical miles of sailing, the winner of the 20th anniversary Hydro Tasmania Three Peaks Race came down to the final 33 kilometre run up Hobart's Mt Wellington and back. Tasmanians Paul McKenzie and Mark Guy set the pace from the race's first run leg, completing the 65 kilometre Flinders Island course in 5 hours, 56 minutes. They were followed by Victorians Andrew Kromar and Michael Wheatley, who ran six hours flat to elevate their team Westbury-Mersey Pharmacy to second place. Jailhouse Grill's Tim Piper and Mark Padgett overcame injury to post 6 hours, 36 minutes, lifting their team from 14th to third and setting up the top three places for the race's duration.

Nearly all 27 teams tackled Strzelecki's 756 metre climb in the heat of the day. Dehydration caused serious problems but brought out the best of the competitors' spirit, with Nathan Fellows and Steve Jaffray picking up the Extra Mile trophy for helping struggling runners. Light winds and rolling swells affected the sailing leg down Tasmania's east coast to Coles Bay, with seasickness hindering recovery. This caused sev-

eral retirements and in some cases sailors replaced runners on both remaining legs. McKenzie and Guy were the fastest team over the 35 kilometre Mt Freycinet track, finishing ten minutes outside the record time. Despite going into the final sailing leg with a good lead, Shearwater Pure Sprouts couldn't hold off its rivals and the first three boats docked in Hobart within 64 seconds.

'Let us off the boat, we'll run them down', McKenzie and Guy told skipper Phil Marshall, before hitting the course just 21 seconds after Kromar and Wheatley. True to their word, they beat their rivals back to Constitution Dock by 10 minutes, finishing 29 seconds outside Kromar's record Wellington run time of 2 hours, 27 minutes to score the fourth straight victory for Marshall's team. The fastest over all three running legs, they earned a well-deserved King of the Mountain title. Joanna Sinclair won best-performed female runner, James Walsh and Julian von Bibra were the top cruising division runners and Zac MacArthur and Marcus Cramp were the fully crewed division's King of the Mountains.

Team Aphrodite, with two Israeli runners, Alon Peled and Ron Shilon, approaching Mt Strzelecki on Flinders Island. *Paul Scambler*



The Great Volcanic Mountain Challenge and the Cradle Run

John Harding with the latest mountain running news

The Great Volcanic Mountain Challenge at Orange in New South Wales is an 11 kilometre run and walk over forest tracks and walking paths



Neil Labinsky, winner of the Great Volcanic Mountain Challenge, in action. *Marian Knight*

from the foot of Towac Pinnacle to the summit of Mount Canobolas—taking competitors up three volcanic peaks along the way. The race was first held in 2006 and has become one of the most popular trail runs in New South Wales. This year the race record was broken by Neil Labinsky from Nambour in Queensland in a time of 50 minutes, 47 seconds. Runner-up, equalling the 2007 record, was Brad White from Goulburn in 52 minutes, 20 seconds, with Tom Gleeson from Orange third in 55 minutes, 9 seconds. Fourth outright and first female was 17-year-old Veronica Wallington from Canowindra in 56 minutes, 38 seconds. After winning the Volcanic Challenge in 2007, Wallington easily won the Australian junior mountain running champion-

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ships and was unlucky not to win the world junior title in Switzerland, falling while leading the race but recovering to finish third. Another Australian representative, Vanessa Haverd of Canberra, was second female in 58 minutes, 56 seconds, with the former world rogaining champion Julie Quinn of Canberra third in 62 minutes, 1 second.

New Zealanders are fond of claiming that several of their long walking tracks on the South Island are among the finest in the world. There is little doubt that the 82 kilometre Overland Track in Tasmania also achieves this lofty standard. This is the course taken by the annual Cradle Run. It traverses the wild alpine areas of Tasmania's Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park, with the altitude of the track in several areas of the plateau greater than 1000 metres, and well above the tree line. Course record holder Andrew Kromar, from Mt Beauty in Victoria, returned for the first time since 1996 and was again first across the finish, clocking 7 hours, 54 minutes, some 30 minutes slower than the record but understandable given that he is now a veteran at the age of 41 years. Phillip Whitten was second in 8 hours, 52 minutes and David Waugh third in 9 hours. Fastest female was Rachel Waugh in 11 hours, 5 minutes with Jacqui Guy second in 11 hours, 20 minutes and Jane Shadbolt third in 11 hours, 31 minutes. Intending participants have to meet strict entry criteria including a recent sub-four-hour marathon and provide referees for their performances. This year there were 38 finishers from the 42 starters.

Cradle Run record holder and 2008 winner Andrew Kromar, dashing past a checkpoint. *Kerry Merse*



Wild Diary

Wild Diary listings provide information about rucksack-sports events and instruction courses run by non-commercial organisations. Send items for publication to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181. Email editorial@wild.com.au

June

WA State Championships 24 hr R
14-15 June, WA
<http://rogaine.asn.au>

Lake Manchester Trails 12/13/31 km BR
15 June, QLD
www.runtrails.org

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R
15 June, NSW
<http://rogaine.asn.au>

3/6/12/24 hr R
21 June, QLD
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

2 x 6 hr R
21-22 June, VIC
<http://vra.rogaine.asn.au>

Kathmandu Adventure Series M
22 June, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

July

8 hr R
5 July, QLD
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

Winter 6/12 hr R
12 July, ACT
<http://act.rogaine.asn.au>

Junior/Senior Sprint Championships S
19 July, NSW
www.hoppet.com.au

AUMC 12/24 hr R
19-20 July, SA
<http://sa.rogaine.asn.au>

Junior Championships S
19-20 July, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

Cooma Open S
20 July, NSW
www.hoppet.com.au

8 hr R
20 July, VIC
<http://vra.rogaine.asn.au>

Jagadd Bush Capital Bush Marathon Festival BR
26 July, ACT
www.mountainrunning.coolrunning.com.au/events/bmarathon

Junior/Senior Sprint Championships S
26 July, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

Nordic Cabramurra Tour S
26 July, NSW
www.hoppet.com.au

Australian Senior/Masters 15/30 km Championships S
27 July, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

August

Senior/Junior Championships S
2 August, ACT
www.hoppet.com.au

Hotham to Dinner Plain S
2 August, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

AKC Avon Descent C
2-3 August, WA
www.canoe.org.au

Metrogaine 5 hr R
3 August, ACT
<http://act.rogaine.asn.au>

Senior/Junior Championships S
3 August, NSW
www.hoppet.com.au

Charles Derrick Memorial Langlauf S
3 August, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

Australian Senior/Masters Championships S
10 August, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

Bullflight Charge S
10 August, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

KAC X-C Classic S
13 August, NSW
www.hoppet.com.au

Australian Championships 24 hr R
15-16 August, NSW
<http://nswrogaining.org>

KDKCC State Marathon Schools Championships C
16 August, QLD
www.canoe.org.au

Go Natural Multisport M
16 August, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

Snowy Mountains Classic S
16 August, NSW
www.hoppet.com.au

Spring 24 hr R
16-17 August, WA
<http://wa.rogaine.asn.au>

Tullincourt/St Phillip Cup S
17 August, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

3/6/12 hr Upside Down Rogaine R
17 August, QLD
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

Oxfam Trailwalker Sydney 5 BR
29-31 August, NSW
www.oxfam.org.au/trailwalker/sydney/

Kangaroo Hoppet, Birkebeiner and Joey Hoppet S
30 August, VIC
www.hoppet.com.au

September

12 hr R
6 September, VIC
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

State Marathon Championships C
12-13 September, VIC
www.canoe.org.au

QUOLL 15/35 hr R
13 September, QLD
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

Adventuregaine M R
13 September, QLD
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

12 hr Championships R
13 September, QLD
www.qldrogaine.asn.au

8 hr R
13 September, NT
www.rogaine.asn.au

Night Rogaine 6/8 hr R
21 September, ACT
<http://act.rogaine.asn.au>

October

Lake Macquarie 12 hr R
11 October, NSW
www.rogaine.asn.au

State Championship 24 hr R
11-12 October, VIC
www.rogaine.asn.au

Freyinet Lodge Challenge M
11-12 October, TAS
www.tasultra.org

3/6 hr R
12 October, QLD
www.rogaine.asn.au

NSW State Slalom Championships C
18 October, NSW
www.canoe.org.au

NSW State Selection Race C
18-19 October, NSW
www.canoe.org.au

8/12 hr R
25 October, SA
www.rogaine.asn.au

November

6/12 hr R
8 November, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

Southern Zone Championships and State Selection Race C
8 November, NSW
www.canoe.org.au

4/7 hr R
9 November, QLD
www.rogaine.asn.au

Victorian Canoe Slalom Championships C
29-30 November, VIC
www.canoe.org.au

State Championship 24 hr R
29-30 November, TAS
www.rogaine.asn.au

Activities: B bushwalking, BR bush running, C canoeing, M multisports, R rogaining, S skiing. **Rogaining events** are organised by the State rogaining associations. **Canoeing events** are organised by the State canoeing associations unless otherwise stated.

Mont Krypton Tent



Mont tents are back! After much anticipation,

Mont is releasing an innovative bushwalking tent for the Australian market. The Mont Krypton is a freestanding 3-4 season tent with a unique design that enables the inner and fly to pitch as one. High quality lightweight fabrics such as 30 denier Sil-nylon are used for the fly and inner floor, with 3 DAC featherlite poles that cross over in 4 places creating a superbly stable structure in high winds or driving rain.



The Krypton is packed full of features including dual entrances and vestibules, fully seam sealed fly and tub floor, a practical storage loft and 2 pockets, plenty of venting and elbow room for a good night's sleep — its most impressive characteristic however is its unique sewn-in footprint — a simple but incredibly well thought-out idea.

The footprint not only protects the inner floor from moisture, dirt and abrasion, but also allows the tent to be used as a stand-alone fly with integrated floor for the fast and light enthusiast.

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- Dual vestibules
- Dual vents
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- No-See-Um insect mesh
- 4 reflective storm guys

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Queensland: call for park visitor fees

The national peak tourism group, the Tourism & Transport Forum (TTF), has submitted a plan to the Queensland Government calling for the introduction of visitor fees to Queensland's parks—Queensland is the only state where park fees are not charged. The TTF believes that park visitors have a responsibility to contribute to the cost of maintaining and conserving the parks they visit. The TTF's national tourism investment manager, Evan Hall, likened visiting a park to going to the movies: 'It costs around \$15 to go to the movies—so a \$10 to \$15 charge per vehicle for a day in one of Queensland's world-class national parks would be great value.' Hall also said that the increasing cost of conservation demands on parks due to climate change and human development needed to be met somehow. 'It is crucial that tourism and the conservation sector work together to protect our natural environment from the pressures of climate change', he said.

Scroggin

The Amazon

In February two Australians, Nathan Welch and Mark Kalch, rafted the 6400 kilometres down the Amazon River and in doing so became the

tidal surges known to man. At one point they

thought they would have to abandon their trip after they were separated from their raft in white water, spending a cold night out in the bush sans gear, before eventually finding the raft snagged on rocks three kilometres downstream the next day.

With the raft caught in the middle of the river and dangerously powerful currents on either side, it was only at great risk to themselves that they were able to free it and continue on their journey. Along the way they lost various members of their party due to ill health, finally finishing their epic journey after 153 days of paddling.

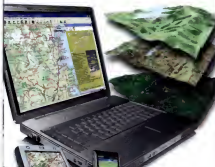
To find out more about their adventure, visit www.expeditionamazonas.com

Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad: do you have what it takes?

The Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad (BWRS) has launched its first ever recruitment drive. In recent years the number of rescue call outs has increased dramatically and in order to keep up with the demand, the BWRS is looking for more volunteers. The squad, which has a 72-year history, was formed on the basis that the best people to search for missing bushwalkers are experienced bushwalkers, who understand the bush and can navigate safely over difficult terrain. The BWRS operates as a self-contained unit within the NSW Confederacy of Bushwalking Clubs, and performs its rescues under the direction of the NSW Police. If you are interested in volunteering or finding out more about this invaluable organisation, visit www.bwrs.org

Bibbulmun Track anniversary

On 13 September this year the Bibbulmun Track celebrates its tenth anniversary. In celebration of this milestone a group of walkers is completing the entire track—all 965 kilometres of it—in what is being called the End to End Walk: Bibbulmun Walk 2008. There will be celebrations in each town along the track, and the end-to-end walkers will also be accompanied by a new group of walkers for each of the 12 sections that make up the Track. The walk begins with an official send-off in Albany on 16 July, and finishes in Kalamunda on 13 September.





THE ULTIMATE

Immersion therapy

Quentin Chester takes a dip in the great outdoors



A rainforest creek in the Border Ranges National Park, NSW. *Quentin Chester*

THE RAIN KEEPS TUMBLING. FOR HOURS NOW it's been falling through the trees. The afternoon began with mist fingering the upper branches. Then grey, dripping clouds came in low. As it hit the spread of leaves and big, floppy fronds the rain started like a burst of applause that just kept going. Even in moments when the rain eases off, there's still the rush of the creek below, gargling its way among the boulders. Not to mention the sound of boots mashing into mud. The wet feet are a lost cause. Moisture is spreading across my shirt, inside what somebody decided to call a 'waterproof' jacket. All things considered I should be miserable. Yet waddling along in the dampness there are no complaints, nor any grumbling companions. In fact, I'm as happy as a pig in you know what.

In just a few dozen strides the forest grabs you. It reels you into a world of green on green, a world that is not so much a place as a play of sensations. Travelling the forest depths, all familiar points of reference—landmarks and horizons, shifts in wind direction, the angle of the sun, the drift of clouds and the register of distant sounds—are gone. You might get a faint change in light or odd wafts of moving air but none of this adds up to much. Instead it's all foreground: new growth on old, a fantasia of leaf shapes, scaly bark, strange plants and gushing sound.

For an outsider these can be seriously foreign places. By chance I recognise a few of the trees, but only because of an earlier walk with helpful little tags nailed to trunks along the track. Even so, the tall timber is still a shock. Big fellas like the booyong with its massive buttresses. Or the grotesque, wrapping arms of a strangler fig: a true monster in the mist. There are the hoop pines standing as straight as temple columns, and yellow carabeens with fins at their base straight off Tin Tin's rocket ship. Throw in all the mosses and ferns, the dangling vines and clinging orchids, the palms, lilies and creepers and it's over the top—a real maximalist's dream. And there's not a wattle flower or gum leaf in sight.

My track through the dripping foliage follows a shallow valley, crossing and re-crossing the creek. The feel of this kind of walking is like the better parts of being lost. I don't have a proper map as such. Or a compass. And, for that matter, not even a watch. There's no looming destination, nor any real sense of where I am. It's just endless variations on a stream. In most other parts of the country wandering off without a marked track wouldn't be a problem. Here, even if it were possible to tunnel through the prickly tangle of vegetation, I wouldn't have a clue what to aim for. So the track it is, and I'm

deeply thankful for that. Surrender to its power and you're free to swim among the trees, forget the world and step outside time.

A Queensland bloke called Bill Robinson has had a good crack at painting the experience of forests like these. For many years he worked a farm near the track I'm on. So he knows how such places get to you. His pictures are not front-on views, but visual whirls going in all directions, with trees and rocks and scraps of sky, tilting and turning. He puts you inside the forest; places where things can appear to come at you and recede in the same instant. The paintings are revealing and intense, full of praise, yet so playful you could hang them any which way. Trees soar like giant celery sticks with broccoli crowns. Boulders are suspended in mid-air. Layers of vegetation writhe and coil. You peer down at a pool in a gorge and find yourself gazing into a star-flecked night sky—all in one glance.

No such reflections are on show as I perch on rocks beside the track. After a week of downpours the creek is running high. Given the churning water and spattering rain, mirror images don't stand a chance. Never mind, there's plenty enough happening for my taste. Crouched under the token shelter of a tree fern it somehow even seems appropriate to consider my good fortune. Despite being soaked through and now under

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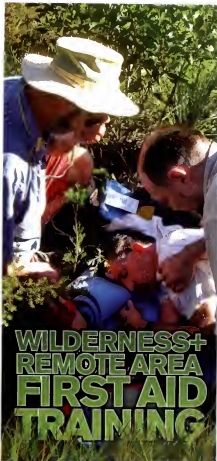


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attack from a swat team of leeches, I'm here in a rainforest of exotica, munching on dark chocolate, feeling warm and guzzling mugsfuls from the creek, an elixir that tastes better than anything you can buy in a bottle.

There's something else too, a kind of hypnotic effect that comes from staring at the water. It pours past, wells up into domes and fizzes around the cobbled rocks below the surface. Eddies of foam spiral out from the main flow and curl against the bank where I sit. In a slightly dazed state of mind it occurs to me that, for all the peculiar forest growth, perhaps the strangest thing of all is spending an entire afternoon in the rain, beside a mountain creek with so much water dashing by. It's a novel experience for which I feel unaccountably grateful. Where I come from things like this hardly ever happen, if at all.

These days water has become big news everywhere. Years of drought, dwindling flows down the Murray, thirsty cities, lakes drying up, ecosystems collapsing—all have become topics spliced on to the bigger climate change discussion. Then again, in South Australia water has always been a scarce commodity. 'The driest state in the driest continent' is a mantra every child learned at school. Some 80 per cent of the place is officially arid and apart from the Murray there isn't a decent-sized river worthy of the name. Rain is a word that seldom features in weather bulletins. Even if showers are forecast the bureau always has its thesaurus at the ready for qualifiers like 'occasional', 'passing' or 'intermittent'. Falls above ten millimetres are a novelty, a daily total above 20 millimetres rates as a deluge of biblical proportions.

Go bush in South Australia and the first thing you think about is water—where to find it and how much to carry. Even in higher rainfall areas on the south coast there's no certainty that the creeks will provide a reliable supply. Head north and the situation becomes more desperate. In some areas years can pass before waterholes are revived and extended outings become an option again. If you serve your bushwalking apprenticeship in such places, then water conservation is not a feel-good exercise but a matter of survival, an article of faith. After a day hauling yourself up a dry creek-bed the sight of a solitary, hand-basin-sized pool tucked at the back of a gorge is so gratifying it feels like a sacred moment—even if the water has the hue and texture of pea soup. A few episodes like this and you begin to grasp the paramount importance of waterholes for desert life and desert people.

The arid inland is just a few hours drive from this rainforest creek but it might as well be in another galaxy. I'm looking forward to going home, seeing the sun and being dry. Yet for now, fuelled up with chocolate, I'm happy to continue upstream through the rain. The going gets steep and slippery. On flatter stretches long pools with newly fallen leaves floating on the surface cover the track. Walking becomes a game of demented hopscotch as I try to dance from side to side over these puddles. It's a bit like how I travel along rocky creeks, springing forward in a kind of jig. But here my boots are caked in sticky, rust-coloured clay and I end up taking a dive, skidding bum first on to the side of the track. Fortunately, the only real damage is a messy stripe of mud down my cargo pants.

As it happens, this matches the one I collected a few days before on the other leg. That fall was more public, a slide on a track down to a waterfall. At the time I was being overtaken by two giggling young boys. Trying to look nonchalant I stepped to one side, but my front foot landed on a palm frond. This took off like a snowboard and sent me flying into the undergrowth. By the time the boys' parents passed me I was on my back, groaning in the mud with a lawyer vine between my thighs. 'Looks nasty,' said the mother, with a grimace that tried to hide a snigger.

A few minutes later I watched this quartet splashing and shrieking with joy in the plunge pool below the falls. I was content just to rest in the shade and nurse my bruises. Humiliating wounds aside, the idea of joining them never entered my head. Despite the heat of the day, the water looked dark and icy green. When it comes to taking a cold plunge my cowardice is all conquering. Some people are adept in any kind of water. They sprint into wild surf without a worry and the sight of a river or waterhole has them stripping off their gear, whatever the season. Not me.

In reality some of this inhibition probably goes back to childhood mishaps. Being pushed into creeks by elder brothers. Falling out of canoes on school camps. Worst of all was the time at Boomer Beach when a wave dumped me so hard that it felt as though I passed out. When finally there was air to breathe my mouth and nostrils were clogged with sand, and shell grit had buried itself in scrapes down my chest. I felt glad just to be alive. Even now when I read Tim Winton passages about going under in the surf, or if I have another go at Richard Flanagan's drowning epic, *Death of a River Guide*, the words hit a live nerve. After a few sentences my heart can be going so hard that I have to walk away and stare at the sky.

But perhaps that's got more to do with the writing than aquaphobia. When friends and family try to shame me into joining them in the drink my line is: 'I'm not a water person.' Again, that's only partly true. I just know that I'm not much cop in big surf or cold stuff. However, give me a protected reef to snorkel in or a creek brimming with warm, velvety water in Arnhem Land and I'm into it. Perhaps the point is that people make their own respectful pact with the elements. Or at least they should. It makes perfect sense to seek out new places and new experiences. Yet to ignore our personal history means we just do the seeking and never appreciate what we've found.

In the last few hundred metres the track leaves the creek and climbs through more open forest. The trees are different here. Step by step the rain eases back to cooler mist and the air gets a fine beading of moisture, the kind that shows up on cowbells. I'm thankful for the chance to pull back the hood of my jacket. Creek sounds give way to surprising bird calls, none of which seem familiar. Everywhere I look, on rocks and trunks and fallen logs there's an unbroken covering of fine green moss. I'm glad I saved a few squares of chocolate. It tastes bitter sweet and I'm grateful for that too. ☺


After 30 years of walking and climbing, Quentin Chester is still tapping into the call of the wild. He has written widely about his travels and tribulations, including books on Kakadu and the Kimberley, as well as many stories about his fervour for the Flanders Ranges. qchester@senet.com.au

NEW ZEALAND LONG WALK

Makarora



to the Sea



Paul Kinnison combines some of the South Island's most famous tramps into a 290 kilometre, 30-day walk

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A DREAMER. SOME OF US DREAM OF A NEW PLASMA television or perhaps a cruise on the *Queen Mary II*. With the help of climbing guides, sailing directions, maps and charts I have climbed El Capitan and cruised the fjords of Chile. But once in a very lonely while my dreams become a reality. This particular dream started in New Zealand in 2006 while tramping with my wife Sharon and son Colin. We met a fellow walker and the usual conversation took place about where everyone was from, and where they were going. This guy had just

*After dinner we sat next to the tarn
and watched Mt Aspiring slowly go
from white to pink. For half an hour
no one said anything.*



done the same walk we'd completed the previous year and said that he wished he'd had more food so that he could just have kept walking. When we returned to Australia I started to plan my dream. It wasn't particularly outrageous or dangerous. In fact it was probably one that others had done before. But it was my dream. What could be better than linking the Wilkin-Young, Rabbit Pass Crossing, Cascade Saddle, Five Passes Walk, some of the Routeburn and the Hollyford into one long continuous walk?



Out came my maps and Moir's Guide for tramping in this part of New Zealand. Yes, there would be some road walking and some rivers to ford and all the logistical problems associated with walking for a number of weeks but the route was continuous, varied and through some of the most beautiful wilderness anywhere. Furthermore, there were 16 huts along the route so a tent would rarely be needed, while it was possible to get resupplied at five different points. The route became known as the Makarora to the sea walk.

Most of my dreams tend to falter owing to a lack of people with whom to do them. Not being a good leader and being an even worse follower has made me adopt a consensus approach. That spreads the blame when things go wrong. I quickly got people interested. Sharon was the first to say she was in. Both of us are on the wrong side of 50, too quickly approaching our 60th birthdays. Knee troubles mean that there may not be too many more long walks left in us before we will need knee replacements or Zimmer frames. There was no way we could carry all the food and equipment for the walk; what we needed were human yaks. Yaks strike me as being strong, gentle animals, capable of carrying heavy weights but not too bright. Our sons fitted the bill. Both of them had just finished uni and were more than willing to be our yaks.

On 7 January 2007 we were in Wanaka with Kevin's friend, Dave Weir (yes, another yak) and family friend Jon Gittoes. Jon and Dave would not stay for the whole time, but that was one of the beauties of this walk, people could drop in or out at a number of points. It was essential that we leave Wanaka quickly. Wanaka is one of the gathering places for what I call New Zealand nymphs, lovely girls from around the globe who were very happy to keep the three boys out of the town until the wee hours of the morning.

I was amazed at how quickly everything was organised. The boys bought \$800 worth of food from the supermarket and quickly organised it into three piles, two of which were put in boxes to be delivered to us at appropriate times. Although there was never a problem within our easy

going group, this was the only point where I had what I call a Hawkie moment. For you older readers, think back to Bob Hawke and how somewhere in a speech there might be a tear or a sniffle. When the boys wheeled those two carts back from the store I almost had one of those moments. There were the usual things like cheese, salami, rice and noodles, but I kept asking my-

self, where are all the freeze-dried meals? What do you get when you send three fit, tight-arsed uni students to the store? Heavy, bulky goods. This was alright until we came to the last three items. The bags of carrots and onions were just

Previous pages, Kevin Kinnison and Dave Weir posing below Rabbit Pass.

Left, Sharon and Paul Kinnison recline in daisies on Pearsons Saddle. **Above,** looking towards Mt Pollux from below Waterfall Face. From left to right, Paul, Kevin, Sharon, Jon Gittoes, Dave Weir and Colin Kinnison.

All photographs by Colin Kinnison

Details of the trip

Roughly 290 kilometres long (including side trips)

Section one

Makarora to Raspberry Flat
8–11 days, 100 kilometres with side trips
Maps: F38 Wilkin, F39 Matukituki

Section two

Raspberry Flat to the start of the Routeburn Track
7–12 days, 70–100 kilometres depending on whether the complete Five Passes Walk is done or the short cut up the Rock Burn to Sugarloaf Pass
Maps: E39 Aspiring, E40 Earnslaw

Section three

Routeburn to the end of the Hollyford Track via Deadmans Track
6–9 days, 95 kilometres
Maps: D39 Lake McKerrow, D40 Milford

acceptable but the third item really bothered me most. I'm going to stop for a moment and offer the readers a zero gravity pack. You can put anything in it. Case of beer? Not a problem. Plenty of room for that big can of ham. One item I will bet none of you put in was a bag of parsnips. To add insult to injury Kevin announced that since Dad's pile was a little small he would take them—I knew then that they would torture me going up and down those steep New Zealand hills. I could feel my knees and back starting to ache just looking at them. However, at times, a Dad's job is to remain stoic; this was one of those times.

Sharon and I investigated transport and permits. Through the wonderful ladies at the Department of Conservation (DOC) we got hut passes, more maps and an emergency radio, which was handy for the weather and to tell the appropriate people when we needed our supplies.

On the morning of 10 January we hopped on the shuttle to Makarora to start our walk up the Young River. All of us greeted the day with excitement but also a degree of dread—the

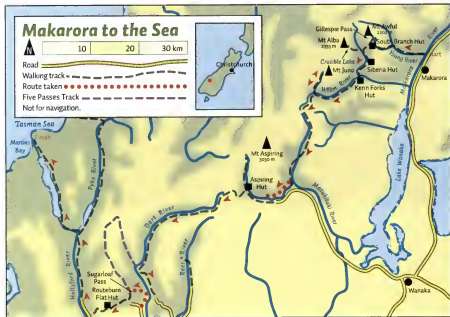
were covering the tops of the mountains and the wonderful view of Mt Awful was not to be had. We had a good time trying to ski down the snowfields on the other side with our boots. After we got down a bit and had lunch we let the party split up, hoping the boys would get us a bunk at the crowded Siberia Hut.

I took my normal place at the back of the group. It is a place that I have always liked because no one is pushing to pass you. That day it meant that I could just go at my own pace. I was really hurting. Every muscle in my body cried out: 'Why, you stupid idiot, did you not just do a little training?' I finally struggled into camp an hour after everyone else. Asked why I was so slow, I had to be truthful and say: 'The pack was too heavy and I'm too old.' What I needed was a couple of rest days. The gods must have been smiling on me, because not only did the rest of the party decide to do the beautiful day trip to Lake Crucible, but Kevin stepped on some wire, cutting open the bottom of his foot and forcing another day's rest. When we finally left Siberia Hut for the easy walk to Kerin Forks

Passes Walk, nor could we have. One of the passes was impassable without mountaineering gear. We walked to a point almost opposite where we had been picked up by the bus and walked up the Rock Burn over Sugarloaf Pass to join our last section at the Routeburn.

While the scenery is beautiful, it is all the people you meet along the way who make a walk like this so enjoyable. There are so many different nationalities sharing their common love of wild places. The wonderful hut system provided by DOC makes New Zealand an extra special place to walk. Some of the huts have wardens who are always helpful. Staggering into Siberia Hut on the second day, warden Paul greeted me with perhaps the most wonderful cup of tea ever. He had plenty of great stories to tell about his time at Mt Cook Search and Rescue. One of his stories was about his seven attempts at climbing Mt Sealy. What had caused him to fail so many times on a relatively easy peak? The answer was easy—hangovers.

Then there was Andrea at Routeburn Flat Hut who spent her winter trapping rats up the Dart



packs were very heavy (over 22 kilograms, except for Sharon's). The first two days were long, with a big climb over Gillespie Pass. I had purposely decided to go on a regime of non-training. I was more worried about injuring myself training than suffering on the first couple of days. As it turned out these would be by far the two hardest days of the trip.

I remembered getting into the first hut, Young Hut, after eight hours of walking. Even the wonderful views couldn't overcome the fatigue. I was totally stuffed. I couldn't even stand up straight. The boys quickly went into dinner-making mode while Sharon gave me a much needed back rub.

The next day proved even harder: the long climb over Gillespie Pass to Siberia Hut on the other side. Another long eight-hour walk with big elevation gains and drops. Getting up towards the pass, Jon lost footing on the narrow trail and did a somersault backwards, coming very close to a very nasty accident before grabbing some grass. We laugh at it now, but it wasn't very funny at the time. Unfortunately, clouds

Hut, the pack was lighter, most of the soreness was gone and I felt ten years younger.

I am not going to go through a blow by blow, metre by metre account of the track. It basically follows a series of beautiful beech-filled river valleys. Clearings provided views of numerous glaciers, snow-capped mountains and waterfalls galore. Every few days it would be necessary to climb above the treeline and cross a pass to the next valley. The scenery was nothing short of spectacular. The walk went exactly as planned until about day seventeen. We had been walking down the Dart River and we needed to cross it somehow to get to our next section, the Five Passes Walk. At this point the Dart is a big, scary, fast-flowing river. Glacial melt makes it so milky that it's impossible to see the bottom. We were hoping to flag down a jet-boat to take us across. At this point Aspiring Shuttles were arriving to pick up the rest of the walkers coming down the Dart. After a quick conference we all decided to take the bus into Glenorchy. The real reason was that we were buggered. We really needed a bed, a shower and some beer. We never did do the Five

Passes Walk. Rats eat the beech tree seeds and multiply. Stoats eat the rats and multiply. When the rat numbers start to decline the stoats begin to eat bird eggs. There has been a large decline in the native bird populations in parts of New Zealand due to introduced predators. We left Andrea as she was just about to dig a new long drop for people who were camping near the hut. How many people do you know who trap rats and dig holes for dunnies?

The three places that most stood out in terms of beauty and interest were Rabbit Pass, Cascade Pass and Martins Bay. Here is a passage from Moir's Guide about ascending the Waterfall Face leading up to Rabbit Pass: 'It cannot be overemphasised that the route up the Wilkin Waterfall Face is extremely steep and exposed. Look for toeholds kicked into the hard earth. The route should not be taken lightly and be avoided altogether when wet or windy. Less experienced parties should carefully assess their ability before attempting this route, even in perfect conditions.' The Waterfall Face is a steep 200 metre grassy slope between two waterfalls.



It's exciting country and feels remote. Sharon, Colin and I had climbed it a year before. After going the wrong way we completed the ascent. What a thrill it was. A few days later we talked to two walkers who had come the day after us. They had also gotten off route and found themselves below some overhangs. As they described it, they were both pretty sure they were going to die. Drastic solutions were called for. They took off their packs and threw them down, then slowly down-climbed the face. They recovered their packs and eventually made it up the proper way. At the top they decided to check the contents of their packs to see if anything was broken. The only thing that was broken was a bottle of scotch. Unfortunately, one of their unattended sleeping bags started to roll, and rolled right over the edge. They looked at each other—neither one was prepared to down-climb the face. Three important lessons are to be learned here. One, make sure that you know every detail of routes like this. Two, keep all scotch in unbreakable containers. Three, if you lose your sleeping bag you may have to share

the Dart Glacier and its surrounding peaks. It had been worth waiting a few days at Aspiring Hut for the rain to stop so that we could have a perfect night here. After dinner we sat next to the tarn and watched Mt Aspiring slowly go from white to pink. For half an hour no one said anything.

When we finally reached the Tasman Sea at Martins Bay, the walk was nearly complete. A small five-seater plane would pick us up in three days and take us to Milford Sound and back to the real world of John Howard, George Bush, Iraq and global warming. We spent those three days eating up our last supplies of food, reading

were waiting for sea kayaker Andrew McAuley to arrive. He never made it.

I should probably mention the two most notable discomforts of walking in New Zealand: rain and sandflies. Anyone doing this walk will have to get used to both of them. Good rain gear and insect repellent with a high percentage of DEET are essential. Remember, those sandflies have been around a long time: Captain Cook named them in March 1773 while anchored in Dusky Sound in his ship *Resolution*. As for the rain, here is an anonymous poem that appears in Margorie Orr's book, *Those Sandflies*:



Above, Kevin Kinnison looking back toward Routeburn Flats from Harris Saddle. **Right,** Colin Kinnison on the Waterfall Face.



a bag with the person next to you for better or for worse.

Climbing the Waterfall Face was just as exciting this time. We camped out near Rabbit Pass just below Pearsons Pass. The night was perfect at the start, but then clouds and wind started to pour through the pass. The tents shook as the wind increased. Jon had to get up in the middle of the night to realign his tent. The next day, after we crossed Rabbit Pass, we came across some other walkers looking exhausted. The wind had been so fierce on that side of the pass that it had snapped their tent poles!

A few people have said that the camp at the tarns on Cascade Saddle is the most beautiful campsite in the world. This is a big call, but one which I will not argue with. The tarns are perched on the edge of a 1000 metre drop to the Matukituki River. Mt Aspiring is to the east, dominated by the elegant south-west ridge. To the west is

boats and playing cards. Each afternoon was spent at a large fur seal colony only 20 minute's walk from the hut. For an area that gets six and a half metres of rain a year we had good weather.

The 400 fur seals, half of which were pups, seemed to really enjoy themselves and were not the least bit scared of us. It was almost like a scene from a beach resort. The adults lay around sunning themselves, with an occasional dip in one of the rock pools to cool off. The pups played and swam and would occasionally get a reprimand from a lounging adult. Out to sea I could see adult seals riding the translucent breaking waves. Were they bodysurfing or looking for food?

Flying to Milford was very exciting; however, it was sad, at a time when the town and a wife

It rained and rained and rained
The average fall was well maintained
And when the tracks were simply bogs
It started raining cats and dogs.

After a drought of half an hour
We had a most refreshing shower.
And then most curious thing of all,
A gentle rain began to fall.


Next day was fairly dry.
Save for a deluge from the sky,
Which wetted the party to the skin,
And after that the rain set in. ☹️

Paul Kinnison has spent years sailing his yacht around the South Pacific, climbing and walking. There have also been plenty of family trips to New Zealand, Alaska, the Barrier Reef, Tasmania and Arapiles.

Feathertop

A SLOW TRA

Steve Waters travels solo across
Victoria's High Country



MY TENT FLAPPED RELENTLESSLY. THE STORM HAD BEEN BLOWING all night and showed no signs of abating. A couple of courageous snow gums creaked defiantly while the horizontal rain peppered the outer skin in drunken morse code. I was paying the price for avoiding the Easter masses camped down at the hut. Sleep was probably down there as well.

It had looked logical on the map. Join Victoria's three highest peaks in one easy multiday stroll across the Victorian High Country. Inspired partly by Glenn van der Knijff's famous 'One Long Day' 24-hour non-stop traverse (see Wild no 72), I was aiming for the other end of the scale—a leisurely five days.

Circumstance dictated a solo trip, which wasn't a concern as I knew most of the route from previous outings. My only prerequisites were a camp on or near both Mt Feathertop (1922 metres) and

Mt Bogong (1906 metres). The direction was a no-brainer: either an easy first-day dawdle along the Razorback with minimal climbing or I could ascend a vertical kilometre with a full five-day pack up Bogong's infamous Staircase Spur.

Being a holiday weekend, I was surprised that nobody else was doing it. The afternoon light on the Razorback was stunning and the weather perfect for walking, but when exchanging destinations with various groups in passing, they all invariably replied: "Wow, I'd love to do that one day." Well, all you need is time (and Glenn proved that you don't even need much of that). Still, not

to **Bogong** VERSE



everyone could throw a sickie on Easter Tuesday, and I took heart that people still sought out wild places, if only for an overnight visit.

Even unfit folk with reasonably heavy packs can make it into Federation Hut from the road in less than three hours. I opted for a lone camp amongst the snow gums high up near the Molly Hill Memorial Cairn, with an uninterrupted view of Feathertop's summit, rather than the lower, traditional site at Federation Hut, which loses the light early.

Late afternoon on Mt Feathertop. All photographs by the author

Memories came leaping out of those poles: of all the times we'd climbed Eskdale Spur in winter, in a blizzard, in a total white-out with the wind screaming, going from pole to pole on our hands and knees.

It was an easy start to an easy stroll. Later that afternoon found me lazing on the summit, surrounded by Mt Buffalo, the Yit-Ma-Thangs (more commonly known as the Niggerheads), the Fainters, Mt Cope and a distant Bogong. In between practising bearings, I had plenty of time to think about time itself. In this hectic modern world, time is the one thing of which we can't manufacture more. We can only split it into ever diminishing fractions. Priorities. Choices. Decisions. Making time is, after all, what it's all about. I'd made my decision and left my worries with my

down an unmarked pad. Sitting in a sunny, grassy clearing by a stream, it makes a perfect lunch spot. Eating slowly, lost in my own thoughts, I was suddenly startled by strange noises. Looking up, I was being stared at by 11 tourists on 11 horses. They started to settle in, so I packed quickly and left. Not that I'm antisocial, but I wasn't ready for 22 pairs of eyes.

I remembered the uphill from Blairs to Westons Hut (Westons Hut also burnt down in the 2006 fires) as being steep and uneventful, but relatively short. Goals and perspectives change when walking alone.



car on the Alpine Road. Getting back to it was a problem for another day.

Finally, the plummeting temperature and rising wind drove me back to camp, filling water bottles on the way from the nearby spring. I cooked an early meal and ate standing, watching a sublime sunset to the south of Mt Buffalo, knowing a little too smugly that nobody down at the hut was getting the same view.

The storm and lack of sleep erased my smugness. It finally passed on before dawn, and I managed to open the fly and watch the sun crawl over the High Plains. Coffee restored my spirits and I soon had the tent down and drying over nearby branches.

The weather looked good and in 20 minutes I had backtracked to High Knob and the start of Diamantina Spur, which would take me east, down to the west branch of the Kiewa River. Down is the operative word—it's a toss-up between the Diamantina and the Staircase spurs as to which one will have you visiting an orthopaedic surgeon quicker. The Diamantina is steeper, but the Staircase is longer. The area survived the 2003 fires and is quite heavily forested; the track at times indistinct, the views disappearing quickly (Diamantina Spur was burnt after this walk in the fires of December 2006 and would be quite different now). The easy stroll turns into a scramble and two hours later the West Kiewa River fire track comes as a welcome relief.

The river provides an opportunity to refill water bottles. Blairs Hut is reached after a short plod, first along the fire track, then a short cut

Three years earlier I'd slogged up the spur with my girlfriend and by the time we'd reached Westons I was stuffed. This time I only paused to remove a leech and munch some scroggin.

After Westons Hut the incline is less severe and the dense sclerophyll gives way to alpine grasses, tussock and snow gums. The track is littered with mounds of brumby dung and the snowpoles begin. My goal is the Cope Saddle Hut at Cope Saddle on the High Plains.

The snow gums peter out as the track continues to climb slowly on to the Plains. A wild, desolate plateau stretching for miles, mostly bereft of shelter, the plains can be dismal in poor weather. Three years ago we'd climbed up from Westons Hut into driving sleet and hail on the way south to Cobungra Gap.

This time the weather was fine and the Plains took on a bleak beauty when doused in late afternoon light. I reached Pole 333, where tracks from four directions converge. Looking south-west, poles lead away to Cobungra Gap and Youngs Yards. To the north-west a line heads towards Tawonga Huts and the Fainters. Turning south-east the poles stretch out towards Mt Cope, little vertical spikes radiating out across the brown barrenness. Everything is perfectly still, no hint of a breeze. I linger briefly, eyeing the lump of Mt Jim off my right shoulder, before pushing on.

A herd of brumbies watch cautiously from afar, the stallion snorting and standing his ground. The day was getting long and I tried to will Mt Cope closer. By the time I finally descended to the tiny hut in the saddle, the sun was sinking and I was more than a little weary. I hadn't seen a

soul since Blairs Hut. The Cope Saddle Hut was (and still is) designed as an emergency shelter and was a flimsier, more spartan construction than either Blairs or Federation Huts. On a previous trip I'd camped on the open ground behind the hut and endured an absolutely freezing night. I'd woken in the night to hear the fly creaking. Not flapping, creaking. Daylight revealed thick sheets of ice coating the fly.

This time I cranked up the hut stove and decided to sleep on the floor. Fool. Little did I realise I was about to have a starring role in *The Siege*

of Cope Saddle. No sooner had I stretched out in my bag and snuffed out the candles when all hell broke loose. Something was trying to gnaw through the plastic I'd stuffed under the door whilst something heavier threw itself on to the roof. I have no idea what hit the window. Gnawings, clawings, scamperings and mystery thuds kept me awake half the night. In the morning I

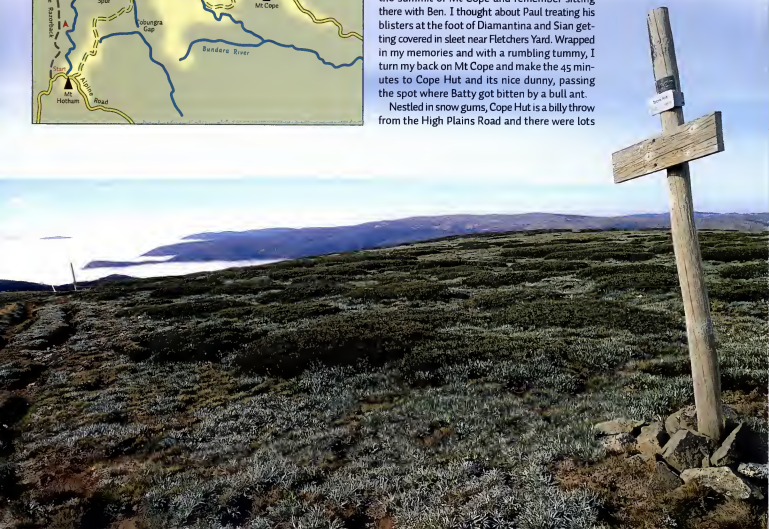


made a vow of chastity—I will never sleep in that hut again (which, of course, ahem, you're not meant to do anyway). There are decent campsites within ten minutes either side of the saddle.

It's hard to stay in the present when travelling over familiar landscapes; they tend to bleed memories. The next day was overcast and a chill wind was coming from the north-west. The High Plains was deserted and monochrome. I look to the summit of Mt Cope and remember sitting there with Ben. I thought about Paul treating his blisters at the foot of Diamantina and Sian getting covered in sleet near Fletchers Yard. Wrapped in my memories and with a rumbling tummy, I turn my back on Mt Cope and make the 45 minutes to Cope Hut and its nice dunny, passing the spot where Batty got bitten by a bull ant.

Nestled in snow gums, Cope Hut is a billy throw from the High Plains Road and there were lots

Sian Robinson taking a lunch break at Blairs Hut, Kiewa Valley West. **Left**, the author on Mt Bogong's summit. **Below**, early morning at Taddell Point, above Cleve Cole Hut, Mt Bogong.



of cars about. I avoided the hut. I was also dreading the next section. The route winds down from Cope Hut to an aqueduct service road, which, whilst perfectly level, follows the contours of the hills, meandering in and out for what feels like an eternity. Some find this easy going, but alone I found the ground hard and the view monotonous. It puts me into a weird headspace.



The bottom of Staircase Spur, Mt Bogong.

Impatient. Familiar ground can be boring. Even my memories of this section are dull.

Relief finally comes at a covered bridge where the route heads away from the road and back into the trees flanking Marm Point. My feet welcome the soft ground of the forest track. At one stage Mt McKay with its mobile phone towers becomes visible. I weaken and briefly ring a friend's answering service before sheepishly turning off the device and banishing it to the depths of my pack. It feels like cheating.

On the northern side of Marm Point the track rejoins the main fire track.

More barren.

More hard.

More monotony.

A couple of Edmonton bikers whiz past. I stop at the turnoff to Edmondsons Hut and eat a hurried lunch, too grumpy to walk down to the hut itself with its luxurious grass and trees. I forget this is supposed to be an easy, relaxing stroll, preferring the day to be already over.

Still, lunch works its wonders and gets me up the steep incline of Mt Nelse. I leave the fire track and head directly to the battered trig of

Mt Nelse North, immediately feeling better to be on broken ground and away from the road. I'm amazed how sapping monotony can be. At 1884 metres Mt Nelse North is only marginally higher than the road, yet it is Victoria's third highest peak. Mt Wills is off to the east, across lower blue ridges and gullies.

Rejoining the fire track at Warby Corner, I look back towards distant Feathertop and the Fainters. I haven't taken a very direct line. In fact the route could only be described as circuitous. Circuitous but easy.

Ignoring the familiar Spion Kopje track I turn north-east and head on to new ground, towards the looming flat-topped bulk of Mt Bogong, the highest in Victoria—the fire track doesn't seem quite so bad any more.

The track winds down the northern flank of Mt Nelse, then heads towards Bogong. It's with immense relief that I greet the spur track to Ropers Hut, leaving the stony road for the last time. Ropers Hut burnt down in the 2003 fires, but the grassy clearing amongst the snow gums at the top of Duane Spur is a lovely campsite, sheltered, with water close at hand. It's only 3:30 pm and I could easily push on to Big River but time is on my side, and tomorrow will be short enough. I waste away the afternoon in the sun.

Which is just as well, because it rains all night. Luckily, my tunnel tent has two entrances and I've perfected the lazy breakfast billy boil out the 'back porch' whilst still in my sleeping bag. Important skills for an easy stroll.

The rain stops by the time I head down Duane Spur, but the dense regrowth is waist-high, soaking wet, and obscures the track. I reach Big River with sloshing boots, so I just plough straight in. There's a cold-looking campsite on the other side where I wring out my socks. The climb up from Big River on T-spur is initially quite steep, and once again the regrowth dense and water laden, and by the time I reach Long Spur, I've stopped twice to empty out my boots. The track junction, dissected by a small creek, marks the beginning of the alpine zone and is another perfect lunch spot.

I was in good spirits, monotony and barrenness banished by the lushness of discovery. Everything was new and I was amazed how different the south side of Bogong is from the north. I pushed on as the track climbed gently through alpine meadows and snow grass plains. A short detour led to Howmans Falls, before heading up through the snow gums to arrive at Cleve Cole Hut in the early afternoon.

Cleve Cole is a serious hut. Built out of stone slabs to withstand blizzards, it sports solar panels, bunk beds, indoor plumbing and a wood-burning stove. The sun came out so I spent the afternoon drying gear on the front steps. A few others arrived and I cooked dinner, still outside, in the dying light. Originally I'd been looking forward to staying in the hut but the prospect of another siege was unattractive so I opted for my tent. Besides, it was my last night and I needed to make an early start—the question of getting back to the car could no longer be ignored. Hitching would probably take most of the day.

The morning was cold and misty. I brewed up from my bag, then packed hurriedly. The tree-line was reached in minutes and soon I'd risen above the clouds to a searingly beautiful, crisp, clear Easter Tuesday. The ascent to the summit

from Cleve Cole is nice and gentle, in stark contrast to the final steep slope of the northern Eskdale Spur. I moved with the confidence of seeing my final goal within my grasp, and ticked off the various landmarks: Tagdell Point, Lendenfeld Point, the short descent to the saddle, Audax, there are the poles coming in from Eskdale. And there I was, back to the known again.

Memories came leaping out of those poles: of all the times we'd climbed Eskdale Spur in winter, in a blizzard, in a total white-out with the wind screaming, going from pole to pole on our hands and knees. There's the pole Cheryl covered behind waiting for Lisa who was wearing a garbage bag. There's the turnoff to the Staircase, always important to find that one, with its promise of easy shelter from the wind. My eyes sting from the ice crystals. There's the dim outline of the summit cairn...

But it was no dim outline today. It was solid rock and stone and there hadn't been any snow for six months or more. It hardly seemed sporting, yet this was Bogong the easy way. I'd only been gone an hour and here I was ticking my last and highest peak, taking the all-important self-timed photographic evidence, chewing a muesli bar and having one final look around. Over there in the distance, beyond Feathertop, was my car. Let's see, down Quartz Ridge, up the Grey Hills or maybe Bogong Creek, get to the Fainters, then what, back to Diamantina?

My feet headed in the other direction, down the long and winding Staircase. Above the tree-line the views are excellent, but once in the forest it's a long, long descent and you find out pretty soon if you should've cut your toenails. The 2003 fires devastated the northern spurs, but Parks Victoria has put in some new track work at the top of the Staircase and the route is easily followed. I'm jolted out of my reminiscence by a thick black snake moving off the track to the left. In ten Bogong trips, this is the first snake I've ever seen. Down some more. The trip is unravelling now. Down, down, past the crappy Bivouac Hut. How come it didn't burn when Michells Hut on Eskdale did? Down, down, down, I just want to get to the bottom.

Two-and-a-half hours later I hit the Mountain Creek fire track—the last obstacle. I sit on my pack and take a quick breather. In 20 minutes I'm signed out and at the car park. The easy stroll is over. I count two cars and no people. I head up the road with my thumb out. The hard part is just starting. 🐍

After Note

This trip was made after the 2003 fires, but before the 2006 fires so some things have changed. The Kievva valley (west branch) was extensively burnt in 2006 including Diamantina Spur and the route up to Weston Hut (and Weston Hut itself). The track on Duane Spur and T-spur is now easier to follow. There have been extensive track works on the top of Staircase Spur. Check with Parks Victoria for current conditions: www.parksweb.vic.gov.au

Steve Waters spent his formative years travelling and hawking dubious IT skills, before maturing into longer walks, climbing, writing and hawking dubious photos. He celebrated his 40th birthday by climbing an active volcano in Kamchatka. Favourite wild places are Tasmania, New Zealand and the Karakoram.

FROM THE Cradle

Fuelled by lollies and boardwalk tallies, Eric Philips and his ten-year-old daughter brave the fickle Tasmanian weather to complete one of Australia's best walks, the Overland Track

GALE-FORCE WINDS, SNOW DOWN TO 600 metres, bushwalkers alert! Yeah, bring it on: I love a bit of weather, who doesn't! But with my ten-year-old daughter Mardi by my side as I read the ranger's weather report, a tingle of anxiety swept over me. The kind of anxiety one might experience when strung out on a rock-climb or embarking on a committing kayak cross-



Mardi rests and refuels on the steep climb above Lake Hanson. Below, Mardi with Cradle Mountain in the background.

All uncredited photos by Eric Philips



ing. These experiences are part of what we know and love about the outdoors, but this was different—the stakes were higher.

It was 3:30 pm, we'd just endured a gruelling eight-hour bus ride from Hobart to Cradle Mountain and were hungry from a missed lunch. Stay? Go? Go? Stay? A glance outside revealed a pearly day; warm, blue sky and still. With four hours of daylight we could get ourselves up into the mountains and into a hut, safe and sound, before the impending storm hit. A quick chat with the ranger settled it. Glancing down at Mardi he offered sturdy advice. 'Those winds will hurl you off the mountain if you're not careful.' Not what I wanted to hear. 'The west side of Cradle will be totally exposed to the wind...but you could go the east side to Scott Kilvert Hut.' That was all we needed. We dashed on to the shuttle bus, disembarked at Dove Lake, wolfed down some lunch, registered our intentions and began our traverse of one of the world's premier walks, the Overland Track.

Tips for parents

- If you're interested in taking your kids on an extended wilderness excursion, be sure it's for the right reasons. If you see it as a breaking out, a novelty or a rite of passage, forget it. Treat it as a serious undertaking requiring appropriate skills and desires, from both parent and child.
- Invest in good gear, particularly pack, boots and waterproofs.
- Be sure to spend time getting your kids prepared for the trek. Some practice walks of increasing difficulty and an overnight camp would be an absolute minimum.
- Be conservative with your schedule. Kids travel much slower; cater for an extra couple of days so you don't need to rush. Use daylight saving.
- Ration all the food to daily amounts, including snacks and lollies.
- Invent a game that will last for the entire walk. It's a distractive technique that can help when the going gets tough.
- Consider all contingencies: communications, medical, extreme weather, water availability, hygiene and more.
- Work hard to conserve your kids' energy—break trail if appropriate, help them up steps and rises, with getting their packs on and off—but put them to work after hours.

Sidling east around Dove Lake, the track quickly branched and climbed through button grass and eucalypts into the hills. The lake dropped away and the backdrop of Cradle Mountain was etched brilliantly against the blue. As we gained altitude, increasing flurries of wind danced around a head full of lean calculations and contingencies. I urged Mardi on a little faster. Skipping the exposed climb over Hansons Peak, we opted for the route that contoured around its eastern spur. Descending to Lake Hanson, the wind continued to increase and we stopped momentarily to admire the skittish willowwaws tearing across its surface. With the aid of walking poles and a bag of lollies, Mardi easily climbed the steep

pinch to the saddle between Cradle Mountain and Hansons Peak. But we emerged to a rapidly changing sky—we were racing the weather and darkness. Though protecting us from the wind, Cradle's looming bulk, coupled with a battery of storm clouds, heightened the sense of foreboding.

'How're you going Mardi?' I enquired.

thermia. In their memory, Launceston community members constructed the hut in which we spent the night and which now lay cloaked in ten centimetres of snow. The next morning, heading up a steep, snowy track to the exposed rim of Cradle Cirque, porridge weighed as heavily in my stomach as Scott and Kilvert did on my mind. It was 0° and we would soon be facing



'Pretty good.' She sounded chirpy enough. 'So far we've passed 29 boardwalks.' I knew her 11 kilogram pack would be weighing on her shoulders but her ability to ponder the abstract while under duress was a relief.

A gentle descent to Lake Rodway steered us out of the wind. At 7:30 pm, as darkness fell, we reached the hut. Seconds after stepping inside the heavens opened and poured snow upon the landscape.

In May 1965, Riverside High School teacher Ewen Scott and student David Kilvert were caught in a severe storm that swept over Tassie's Central Plateau. Succumbing to the numbing cold of an approaching winter, the pair died of hypo-

thermia. In their memory, Launceston community members constructed the hut in which we spent the night and which now lay cloaked in ten centimetres of snow. The next morning, heading up a steep, snowy track to the exposed rim of Cradle Cirque, porridge weighed as heavily in my stomach as Scott and Kilvert did on my mind. It was 0° and we would soon be facing

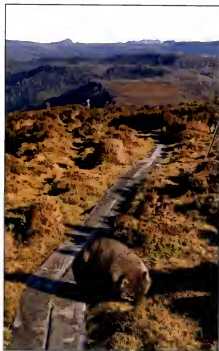
the full brunt of a wind that shredded the storm clouds overhead. Stopping below the ridge to put on another layer, we looked back over our ascent to a snow-covered valley pocked with sparkling tarns, windows of sky sweeping over the landscape.

'I'm so happy', beamed Mardi. 'I love this snow.' I couldn't agree more, having spent a good part of my life chasing it, but yesterday's anxiety returned threefold as we met the fury of the storm. I fretted. Was Mardi ready for this? The moment we topped out on to the cirque's treeless ridgeline, we were ambushed by a furious blizzard. Holding hands, we lurched through the snow, thankful for the closely spaced track

markers. Without these we'd have had little choice but to retreat. Connecting with the Overland Track proper, we headed south-west into the wind. Behind us the sky was thick with cloud but to the west it opened and closed like shutters, sporadically revealing Barn Bluff's conical summit. All the while I scanned our immediate vicinity for a rare campsite in case we were utterly swamped, mentally rehearsing the familiar procedure for pitching a tent in a blizzard.

'Can I take some photos?' enquired Mardi. I was clearly making more of this than she was.

Mt Ossa is clearly an alpine mountain, exposed both meteorologically and vertically, and I shadowed Mardi closely. This was no place to lose concentration, or to dally.



A wombat having a quick feed. Glen Turvey. **Left**, Mardi climbing the rocky chute to the summit of Mt Ossa.

'I hope it keeps snowing for the rest of trip.' Dressed in quality gear and with the prospect of a warm, dry hut not far away, she was unperturbed by the storm, leaving me glad that we'd committed to the push over the cirque. Later that evening she confided to her journal: 'Today was one of the best days in history.' I wondered what twist in circumstances could have had David Kilvert penning the same words more than four decades earlier. Like drunks we staggered along the buffeted ridgeline, eventually descending into the wintry stillness of Waterfall Valley to arrive at its namesake hut by 2 pm.

We shared a pleasant evening with three other walkers, including Bill from Bendigo.

Baby Bunting Bushwalking Tips

The logistics of getting outdoors with your baby, by **Chloe Simons**



Jed Simons looking pretty comfortable in his carrier. Manabu Kondo

There is nothing more precious than your newborn baby, but there is also a limit to how long you can stay indoors! My son was due to be born in December 2006. 'I'll be able to do heaps of bushwalks over summer and we can go camping and surfing', I said to my husband.

I'm not too proud to admit that things didn't go exactly as planned. Jed was born one month premature, a terrible sleeper and frequent feeder. I hardly had the energy to make a cup of tea, let alone bust out the old walking boots. However, after a month or two of this I realised that getting outdoors again was actually going to save me.

The packing and planning for my first adventure took nearly as long as the walk itself—there is a lot more to think about when you are totally responsible for someone else! Here are some suggestions for getting out and about with your little one.

It is generally recommended that babies shouldn't be put in a back carrier until they are about six months old and have good head control. Before this, babies should be in a front carrier. I used one on short, flat walks but it can be difficult to see your feet, and it is also harder to walk up steep hills.

Until you've had some experience with babies, it's hard to comprehend the amount of equipment they need, even when heading out for a small outing. One explosive nappy or milky overflow can necessitate a whole outfit change. Be prepared! A baby carrier with lots of storage (or a friend to carry everything for you) is handy. Something to use as a light change mat is also useful.

One thing that keeps the outdoors experience interesting is wild and fickle weather. Dress your baby warmly. You will warm up as you walk, but the little tacker won't. If you feel an icy little hand on the back of your neck, it's time to layer up a bit more.

You also have to keep your bub out of the sun. Light cotton clothes and a hat will keep the sun off, but it may be worth investing in a baby carrier with a shade hood. Sunscreen can easily end up in babies' mouths.

It's obvious, but don't forget about your baby back there. Watch out for low branches and scratchy bushes—banging your child's head on a log would rate pretty high on the parent-guilt scale! Babies can also grab at stuff while you're walking past, so make sure no poisonous foliage ends up being eaten, and check every now and again that no ants or leeches are making their way towards your plump, vulnerable baby.

If you are lucky enough that your baby sleeps in the carrier, check that he or she isn't in a contorted position, and breathing isn't hindered. Your baby also needs a stretch and change of position every so often.

Clothing

More companies are now including kid-sized outdoors gear like thermals and fleeces in their ranges. Snowgum, Columbia, Mountain Designs, Icebreaker, Sherpa and Kathmandu make clothing for the toddler age and up. Kathmandu has baby suits for six- to 18-month-olds.

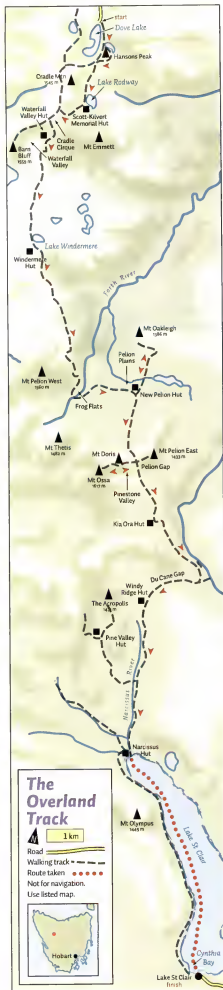
Disposable nappies are really convenient, but also really bad for the environment. Some environmentally friendly products are available, including those from Eco Direct (www.ecodirect.com.au), some of which are 100 per cent certified biodegradable.

Baby carriers

If you plan to do longer walks with your baby, choose a back carrier with a good harness and plenty of storage room. A system for attaching a cover for shade or rain is also important. Other handy features are a small pocket that you can reach easily without taking the carrier off and a mirror for checking what your little one is doing back there. (See the survey in *Wild* no. 101.)

Most importantly, don't make it a stress. Start with a few short walks before heading out for the whole day or an overnight sojourn.

Chloe Simons is an outdoors education teacher from Hobart. Her favourite activities are bushwalking, snowboarding, mountain biking and travel with her family. Jed's favourite activities include eating, playing in the bath and looking at fish tanks.



Now in his mid-50s, Bill was a longtime member of a bushwalking club, had walked the Overland Track thrice before and spent a good deal of time in New Guinea's highlands. Full of fascinating stories, Bendigo Bill's life as a wily bushman contrasted with his sorry equipment. As he proudly showed us his collection of \$2 boots, hats and overpants, I shuddered to think of anyone less experienced coming over that ridge similarly equipped. Together with the vulnerability of soft-boiled youth, it'd be a recipe for more than just tears.

Overnight, light snow continued to fall, frosting Mardi's snowman. After treating some hot spots on her heels, we slipped on dry boots and waterproofs (courtesy of the gas heater) and hit the track. With Mardi out front, we slipped into a comfortable pace, quickly falling into a discussion about what constituted a boardwalk. There's no way that new boards covering old represents two boardwalks, and to step from one to another without touching the ground makes it the same boardwalk... surely! With the tally already at 115, there was

glacial depression, Lake Windermere. Its namesake is in the UK's Lake District, but the Aussie version, despite its drapery of mist, is unmatched in sheer untouched beauty. Visitors to Chilean Patagonia could well imagine Tasmania's glacial period, ending only 1000 years ago, when ice shaped the very land on which we now walked.

On reaching Windermere Hut, Mardi wasted no time in photographing the abundant wildlife. An animal lover from birth, she dedicated a page in the back of her journal, next to the boardwalk table (105 today!), to animal sightings. By the journey's end, it included Tasmanian pademelons, wallabies, wombats, a pink robin and a tiger snake.

Snoring infiltrated the night air so we rose early, downed some muesli bars with a hot drink and tended to Mardi's heels. We felt well rested and ready for the 17 kilometre haul to New Pelion Hut. Glimpses of sun filtered through the thinning clouds, invitation enough to remove waterproofs and slap on some sunscreen. As if insulating the soil from frosty winters, blankets



Left to right, Mardi snacking amidst a wonderland of frost-encrusted bush. Mardi and Eric enjoying a snow flurry. 'These boots are made for walking.' On the shores of Lake St Clair on the last day of their walk.

to be no shortage of fodder for our debate. One thing is certain, the boardwalks are a welcome and necessary part of the track, reducing the impact on the environment and rendering mud-logged boots a thing of the past.

Following the snowy track through undulating button grass moorlands, the ancient mountains shrouded in low-lying cloud, it was easy to overlook the mammoth challenges faced by the track's pioneers. In 1931, benefiting from the knowledge of Aborigines, trappers and guides before them, a party of nine men and women completed what is regarded as the first traverse of the Overland Track. Without the comfort of gas-heated huts, signposted tracks and elevated boardwalks, theirs was a truly pioneering undertaking, opening a slice of bushwalking history that would lead to the park's inscription on the World Heritage list.

Glimpses of rugged Mt Oakleigh appeared through the murk as we descended through snow gums and prehistoric *Nothofagus* to an old

of fallow button grass lay in vast plains across the land, each clump sprouting slender stems topped with a spherical flower, like thermal probes. After a quick detour to the lookout over the Fort River, the track climbed on to a prominent hill whose southern aspect was covered in a mysterious stand of myrtle, pine and sassafras, all caked in verdant moss.

By mid-morning the sky had all but cleared revealing a million-dollar panorama. A string of snow-sprinkled mountains filled our view, from the broad massif of Mt Pelion West to Mt Thetis's rugged ridgeline and the nipped spire of Paddys Nut. Beyond lay the summit of Tasmania's highest peak, Mt Ossa, an objective that we had begun contemplating with the improvement in the weather. But with tiring shoulders, we would first need to reach the next hut, just visible on Pelion Plains at the head of the Fort River. It didn't look so far!

Meandering around the broad spurs plunging from Mt Pelion West, the historical Innes Track, once a thoroughfare for stockmen and miners,

descends laboriously towards the head of the Forth River, spilling into a dank, croaking button grass meadow appropriately named Frog Flats. We stopped for a well-earned lunch of crackers, cheese, prosciutto, jam and peanut butter.

A sporadic assortment of sodden logs did their best to span the quagmire and we skipped, hopped and slopped through the 'extreme bog', all the while ascending slowly from the valley floor to the long-anticipated Pelion Plains. With maintenance to this heavily forested section of the track limited due to the difficulty of access, it was here we reached the height of our boardwalk debate. Passing the turn-off to the old hut, it was with weary delight that we finally spied New Pelion Hut through the trees and, with groans of disgust, peeled off dripping boots and shoes on its sunny verandah. This sizeable hut, with its numerous bunk rooms, stainless-steel bench- and table-tops, dual gas heaters and generous wraparound verandah, is testament to the popularity of this part of the walk, which can also be accessed from Lake Rowallan to the east.

Before long we reached Pelion Gap. A strong but warm wind gunned through the pass, funnelled by Mt Ossa and its opposing peak, Mt Pelion East. Stark against the cobalt sky, Mt Ossa towered 500 metres above us, its ungainly summit ridge all but obliterating the western skyline. Shouldering Mardi's reshuffled pack, I scanned the heavens. Except for the wind, it was perfect.

Without the burden of our heavy packs, we floated around the southern flank of Mt Doris, her surface of heath and scoparia scored with rock outcrops and jewelled by pockets of snow, lending the terrain a surreal atmosphere. In the saddle between Doris and Ossa, we copped the full force of the wind and pulled hats and hoods over our ears. Tiptoeing around the luminous cushion plants that abounded here, it was easy to recognise how vulnerable they were to the ravages of a single footprint.

After a few lollies we began the climb. Mt Ossa is clearly an alpine mountain, exposed both meteorologically and vertically, and I shadowed Mardi closely. This was no place to lose concentration, or to dally. A traverse across a steep snow

and a highlight of my experience. We talked of future plans, perhaps climbing some more of the higher peaks in the vicinity or walking the South Coast Track.

A series of spectacular waterfalls breach the lazy flow of the Mersey River and we ducked off the track to savour their cool blasts of moist air. It made me wonder if every creek in the expansive national park had truly been explored and whether similar cataraacts remained undiscovered. I suspect so.

From Hartnett Falls the track cuts sharply east, climbing steadily over Du Cane Gap and into the lush Narcissus Valley. A steep descent took us to Windy Ridge Hut, nestled in thick forest and overlooked by the aptly named Acropolis, one of the park's many names inspired by Greek mythology. After pitching the tent we wandered over to the little hut to cook our last dinner of spag bol and a double serve of vanilla pudding, chatting with the dozen or so walkers from all over the world.

The night brought some powerful winds and a sprinkling of rain and with it a sense that our spell of good weather was over. With a leisurely nine kilometre descent to the afternoon ferry across Lake St Clair, there was plenty of time to enjoy our last day. Numerous skinks lay on the warm boardwalks, skitting into the gaps as we marched past. Every bend seemed to reveal a new mountain and with each I looked for signs of a basin that could hold Australia's deepest lake. After crossing the suspension bridge over the Narcissus River (boardwalk or not?) glimpses of the lake appeared and before long we were lunching at Narcissus Hut on its northernmost shore. The 18 kilometre ferry ride to Cynthia Bay seemed a rewarding ending to the walk. Besides, after 170 boardwalks, we'd had our fill.

Mardi and I ambled down to the shore of Cynthia Bay. A brooding sky hung over Lake St Clair, starkly juxtaposed against the lightness in our step. From Mardi's perspective, she'd just finished the biggest physical challenge of her life and an introduction to what I hope will be a lifetime of wilderness experiences. For me, it was witnessing her leap to a new level of awareness, and an encounter with another of our world's astonishing natural wonders. It ranks among the best. But it's the combined experience, of father and daughter wrapped in a sliver of sublime nature, removed from the clutter of everyday life, that I'll cherish most.

We wandered up to the park centre. Seconds after stepping on to the verandah the heavens opened and it poured with rain. ☔

Overland Track Information

Map: Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair TasMap

Booklet: 'The Overland Track: one walk, many journeys', Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania

Books: *Overland Track*, by John and Monica Chapman.

Web site: www.overlandtrack.com.au

Early family walks in the Flinders Ranges and the Gramscans gave Eric Philips a life-long love of the outdoors and set him up for his career. His regular polar expeditions are interspersed with his own family forays into the Tassie bush.



Although tired by the long day, a distance pushing the limit of what a ten-year-old should endure, the evening view across the plains to a glowing Mt Oakleigh inspired us to use Mardi's new tent.

'It's so peaceful without the snorers', remarked Mardi, her hood-rimmed face illuminated by the headtorch reflecting from her Harry Potter book.

'That's for sure', I sighed. I was in a somnolent limbo, fading in and out between the pages of *An African in Greenland* and dreams that were equally arcane.

'How did you sleep, Mardi?'

'Dad...you snored!'

Erk!

Today would be another big day. Though the distance to the next hut, Kia Ora, was only nine kilometres, we had decided to climb Mt Ossa. A gloriously warm October morning kicked us into gear and we hoisted our packs and headed south, climbing gently through the dappled native pine forest. Mardi showed no ill-effects from yesterday's long haul, singing, counting boardwalks and marvelling at the Dr Zeuss-esque pandani. Her boots didn't give her feet further grief.

slope led to a precipitous rocky chute between two dolerite buttresses, followed by a final snow incline to the wind-torn summit ridge. Turning north, we stomped through snow to the 1617 metre summit. Alone on the roof of Tasmania, a skyline of magnificent peaks encircled us—Cradle Mountain, the Du Cane Range, Cathedral Mountain, Frenchmans Cap...What a place! Unable to find a windless nook, we ate lunch hastily below the summit before carefully retreating to Pelion Gap, arriving five hours after our departure. Repacked, we began the descent through Pine-stone Valley to Kia Ora Hut. Stopping to look back at Mt Ossa's fluted skyline, Mardi was all smiles. 'I know we've done it but I can't believe it.' Our friends, already settled in the hut, greeted her with cheers and high fives. We'd covered 13 kilometres in nine hours, climbed almost a kilometre in height and counted 317 boardwalks. Days like that become indelible memories.

Dressed lightly for a warm day, Mardi took the lead to our final camp. Our sixth day and we'd hit our straps, easing quickly into a steady stride, a walking pole each for support. To observe Mardi so comfortable in both the physical and emotional elements of the walk was a real joy

Time, the **elements** and **rock**

Grant Dixon documents the beauty of Tasmanian rock



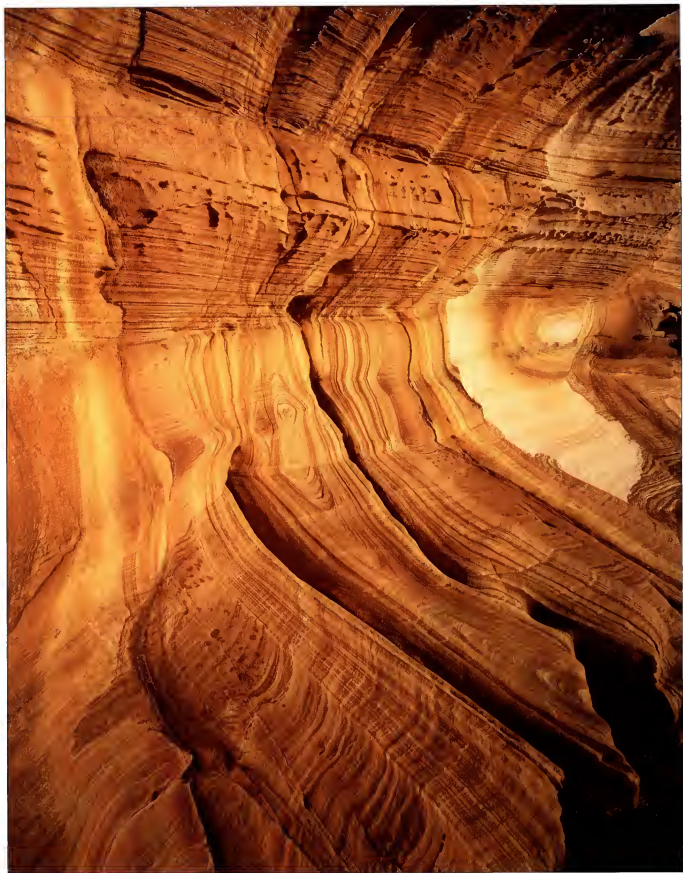
Quartzite folds on the Western Arthur Range.

Right, sandstone at South Cape Bay.

Far right, dolomite columns at Mt Field National Park.









Grant Dixon is a widely published, Tasmanian-born nature and travel photographer and a professional natural scientist.

Limestone on the Franklin River.
Left, sandstone on Maria Island.

Hinchinbrook

**Mark Crean
explores the
Thorsborne
Trail**



Island



From far left to right, early morning walking along the beach at Zoe Bay; Little Ramsay Bay from Mt Bowen Saddle; Queensland critter; Paul Van Den Dolder, Mark Crean and Mal Mellows. All photographs by the author

ALL OF THIS STARTED BACK IN NOVEMBER 1987. I OVERNIGHTED AT Zoe Bay, Hinchinbrook Island, on a yacht called 'Vector'. Zoe Bay was described in one of our yachting guides as 'Probably the most picturesque spot on the entire east coast of Australia'. I wouldn't consider myself qualified to verify such a claim, but we thought this boast warranted investigation.

It is certainly a very serious contender for the title. As most readers probably know, this island national park is the largest in the world and enjoys a World Heritage listing. A four-day bushwalk (32 kilometres) called the Thorsborne Trail saunters along the east coast.

I knew one day I'd be back. However, the impetus for this was beyond me until my 40th year loomed, and I wondered what I'd like to do to mark the auspicious event—something a bit out of the box.

And so it was in September 2006 that Paul Van Den Dolder, Mal Mellows and I found ourselves being boated across the Herbert River to Mulligan Beach at the southern end of Hinchinbrook Island. After 19 years, I was back.

We had decided to go from south to north as you can visit the resort at the top of the island to freshen up before the flight home. Thus our first four kilometres were along wide sand flats festooned with mangrove seed pods, leaves, five point star shells, crabs, driftwood and other tropical details. This was definitely no Sydney beach.

In September, Hinchinbrook usually receives an average of half an inch of rain spread over six rainy days. We arrived the week after 15 inches of rain had fallen, driving the cane harvesters off their farms and into their fishing boats. Thus the cobalt sky was washed clean and cloudless while the streams that cut across the beach were full and frolicking. Mt Diamantina (955 metres), with garlands of waterfalls and many shades of tropical green, formed a dramatic backdrop.

We stopped for lunch at the end of Mulligan Beach where the track heads into the rainforest. A blue Ulysses butterfly dithered about the entrance of the forest, luring us into the shadowy green under-canopy. While enjoying our lunch, we peered into the shade, wondering what lay ahead.

This was where we first discovered a Hinchinbrook phenomenon—not only the variety of flora, but the rapidity with which it changes. If you look at your boot, you'll miss it. You think you're in rainforest but then you look up and you're in heath, or temperate forest, or melaleuca stands or beachside pandanus forests. After only ten steps into the rainforest, we'd completely left the beach.

We were in a different place. The track took us through a kilometre and a half of pure, untouched rainforest skirting around Diamantina Creek and the many watercourses that plunge down off the Diamantina's flanks. In late afternoon light we arrived at the first night's camp—Mulligan Falls—as pretty a campsite as you'd ever hope to find. A noisy pitta hopped about in front of us in a sort of welcome dance.

The camp is in the middle of rainforest and adjacent to Mulligan Falls, a 20 metre fall with a large freshwater pool at the bottom. The granite boulders around the edge of the pool were still warm from the late afternoon sun, and we had the place to ourselves. Our first night's dinner was spaghetti bolognese with cherry toms and chilli paste. I couldn't recall ever having bushwalked this comfortably.

Some walkers like to get going early in the morning, while the natural world is in the fresh flush of the dawn, the birds are greeting the day, and the temperature is still ideal. We're not among them. On our first Hinchinbrook morning, we stumbled over to the waterfall pool and

...our first four kilometres were along wide sand flats festooned with mangrove seed pods, leaves, five point star shells, crabs, driftwood and other tropical details. This was definitely no Sydney beach.

flopped in. That set the tone for the Thorsborne Trail: it's not a racetrack; it's for soaking in.

I did some time in the 'swimming machine' at the fall's base, a truly Hinchinbrook way to greet the day. Snorkelling in the pool revealed that it was about 15 feet deep, the granite scooped out in deep bowl shapes. The jungle perch were not shy, in fact the way they congregated hungrily about one's toes was a little off-putting. This is not the Amazon!

After an omelette for breakfast ("How much do you think these eggs weigh each?" "I don't know, 50 grams?" "I'm just trying to calculate how much weight I'm getting rid of."), we set off up to the saddle taking us from Mulligan Bay to Zoe Bay.

The reason why it is recommended to take four days to do 32 kilometres is that it's just criminal to hurry Hinchinbrook. The Thorsborne Trail is not one for the manic outriders, it's a place to wind it all back a bit and get some perspective—that valuable quicksilver that seems to run out on you if you don't watch it. So I don't feel guilty saying we dawdled over to Zoe Bay.

The track takes you up from the rainforest into heath, with plenty of grass trees. You get a good view down to Sunken Reef Bay, an alternative campsite to Mulligan Falls. This saddle is the high point of the track, just over 400 metres.

A permit is required from a separate government department to climb the mountain de-

scend and only two parties out of six are allowed through each month, so book a long time ahead. We were taking six days to do the Thorsborne because we were climbing Mt Bowen.

We crossed many streams, all of them full and clear, on our longest day—seven and a half kilometres. Furtive glimpses of the mountains further north were offered through the forest

this stage, as he'd picked up some bug the previous week and was bearing up on the walk in stoic silence. I was happy to spend more time here so that I could let the place soak right in.

I can hear you snort with disgust; did we want a walk or a resort? Although Hinchinbrook does offer some peaks with steep climbs, the Thorsborne Trail itself is a different style of walk.



Above, Little Ramsay Bay. Right, a melaleuca grasping the rocks like an octopus at North Zoe Creek.

from the top of the saddle. We didn't see anybody all day. Our *laissez faire* conversation slowed to a Queensland pace, and the humming insects and tropical spring warmth threatened to lull us into silence. We lunched high on a stream, enjoying utter tranquillity.

Shortly after lunch we turned a corner and the vista of Zoe Bay went 'Bam!' The track leads you out to the top of Zoe Falls, 30 metres above the pool, and you look straight out over one of Australia's best beaches. I could have sat there all day. However, we eventually clambered down the steep track beside the falls to check out the pool. After a quick reconnoitre, we followed South Zoe Creek virtually down to the sand of Zoe Bay. The next campsite was nestled in the shade of the rainforest just behind the beach.

After setting up camp, I enjoyed a late afternoon stroll along the beach. The gorgeous light on the mountainsides accentuated their angular ridges and unusual shape. There were only two other people on the beach, and two yachts anchoring as I'd done 15 years previously. The sighing intrigues of the ripples in the water, the tropical afternoon warmth, golden tints in the light, patterns in the sand—what can you say?

The next day we decided to hang out at Zoe Bay for a rest day. Paul wasn't 100 per cent at

It's about sense of place more than bagging summits. Now I was back at long last, I didn't want to hurry the experience.

Accordingly, the next morning I was up before the sun (mainly because I went to sleep at about 8 pm the night before—there are no fires on Hinchinbrook). There was still no sign of clouds. I stumbled the 25 metres from my tent down on to the beach, trusty camera firmly in hand. Even after last evening's magic, I wasn't ready for this morning.

The sea was glassy, reflecting the full moon coming down behind the mountains. The peaks were already catching a peachy, purple light and they, too, were all reflected in the sea. It was one of those times when God throws 'the book' away and leaves you staggered with the beauty we have around us.

As the sun rose from the sea, everything followed its progress in constantly changing light. Shells, crabs and mangrove seed pods throwing unusual early morning shadows. Coconut palms, pandanus, flame trees, mangroves lining the sand, keeping the rainforest a few metres further in. I walked slowly along the beach and found an old nautilus shell down the end, half buried in the sand. I don't know how long I strolled, I was engrossed in every tropical detail.

It was about mid-morning when I got back to some pancakes and tea. Four or five lace monitors patrolled the campsite. Mal and I decided to walk along the beach again and check out the estuary of North Zoe Creek. It was very quiet up there, with no footprints except our own. We saw a baby black-tipped reef shark in the shallows of the estuary, and plenty of

a-wo' of the fruit dove, palms, mosses, and more. As a Sydneysider, Hinchinbrook's rain-forests knock me for six. I don't know how to put it into words. It's just a really, really good place to be.

Among many smaller creek crossings, we pause for morning tea at North Zoe Creek, with its many mature melaleucas clasping the rocks like white octopuses. The silence is thick on the



flighty fish. To me, the mangroves down this end seemed a good habitat for crocodiles and I didn't feel like hanging around.

The afternoon consisted of a 25-minute stroll up through gorgeous rainforest to Zoe Falls, and a snorkel in Zoe Pool. The same jungle perch were licking their lips at my toes as I flopped around. The water in the falls was about six or seven degrees warmer than that of the pool as it had been warmed up on its way down in shallow creek-beds. The weather was perfect, right down to the light southerly breeze that took the bite out of the heat.

Stag Chili and rice in tortillas made an appetising dinner. White-tailed rats—Australian marsupials—started to make their presence felt at about 8 pm. These guys were big, like small possums, leaping about in the trees like monkeys. Strong boxes are provided at the camp site for all packs and foodstuffs to be locked away overnight.

Our fourth day on the Island began with a 6:30 am kick-off. Once more the morning was picturesque beyond words. We tramped along the beach for a kilometre and then plunged into the rainforest again, followed by three or four kilometres of flat walking in an unbroken stand of rainforest. All the classic rainforest details were there: stranger figs, wait-a-while vines, tens of thousands of ferns, the 'wulluck-

ground, like the warm and slightly humid Queensland air.

There is a long gradual climb out of the Zoe Bay basin, with good views looking backwards. One of the Hinchinbrook pamphlets I'd picked up informed me that golden orchids could be found in this part of the walk, namely, on the rocks behind Banksia Bay. I knew they bloomed in September so I was keen to take the 300 metre detour to find them.

The small beach of Banksia Bay was untouched and deserted. Four baby black-tipped reef sharks circled in the brackish water of the estuary mouth. Yes, the golden orchids were there aplenty, in full bloom. I took a snorkel around one of the points and saw a few tropical species including a large regal angel fish that spooked me almost as much as I spooked it. I also found the recently shed shell of a painted cray.

We pushed on to Little Ramsay Bay. As Paul was still doing it tough, he had decided not to climb Mt Bowen (721 metres). We intended to climb up from Little Ramsay Bay and return down a different way to Nina Bay. This meant Mal and I could either carry all our gear up the mountain with us, or stash half our gear at Nina Bay before we left. We decided to do the latter, so Mal and I left Paul at Little Ramsay that afternoon and bolted up to Nina Bay, hid our stuff there and bolted back by late afternoon.

The next morning, Mal and I followed the watercourse up the flank of Mt Bowen. Meanwhile Paul went by himself around to Nina Bay, feeling a little bit like Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*. The plan was that Mal and I would share the time carrying his pack up to Mt Bowen saddle and set up a camp there. However, I found the rock hopping up the steep watercourse with a pack on too hard going for me. Mal carried it the whole way (thanks, mate, you saved the expedition).

Toward the top of the watercourse, we were faced with a choice of two creek-beds. The watercourse on the left had greater water flow, but the one on the right boasted a good clear cairn. We decided to go right. With hindsight we should have gone left. At about 3 pm we emerged on to a tiny 'saddle' between North Peak and Mt Bowen. We dropped the pack and tried to force our way around to Mt Bowen, where we should have emerged. This was time-consuming and occasionally dangerously close to big drop-offs. Daylight was draining away and by 5 pm it was clear that Mt Bowen had eluded us this time. Do you know that 'maybe next time' feeling?

Mal and I agree that had we made the right choice at the cairn we probably would have made it. As it was, we got on to one of the minor peaks between North Peak and Mt Bowen and got some grand views. We really only missed the satisfaction of bagging the peak.

On day five it was thought prudent to return the way we had come up, rather than pick out a new route down into the Nina Bay basin. Going down the watercourse through some (you guessed it) magnificent rainforest, I even saw some orchids I had never seen before and as yet have been unable to identify.

We made it back to Little Ramsay Bay by about 12:30 pm and around to Nina Bay by 2:30 pm. Swimming in the sea that afternoon was glorious. As we lolled about in the waves, looking back over the sea to the mountains looming high over Nina Bay, we were able to see parts of our descent that morning. A stunning late afternoon light backlit the mountains in warm gold, reflecting the temperature. At last the kindly southerly had managed to gather some clouds together—our first five days had been crystal clear.

On day six, we walked a mere two and a half kilometres to Ramsay Bay, where the Thorsborne Trail ends in a mangrove walkway to a navigable stream. Here you can either take the ferry back to the mainland, or, as in our case, visit the resort at the northern tip of the island for some real food and showers.

Without doubt the Thorsborne Trail traverses the most picturesque landscape I have ever walked. The rainforest details and beaches, along with the waterfalls and pools and variety of scenery, defy description. If one chooses just to do the track itself, it's an easy grade. The detours are tougher but not technical or requiring superfitness, just some fitness. I recommend taking a rest day at Zoe Bay, on a weekday, not so much for rest as to take the time to absorb this glorious location. 📍

Mark Crean grew up and still lives in the Sutherland Shire, bushwalking in the Royal National Park. His first sense of really getting away in the bush came on a three-day hike in Morton National Park, equipped with a duffle bag and an esky that mum had packed with a large ham! Most recently, Mark has been hanging out in the bush, taking photos of orchids and reptiles.

IN AND OUT OF THE KOWMUNG

Meg McKone revisits an old favourite

IT WAS ON A DAY IN 2006, AS I LABOURED UP ROOTS RIDGE FROM THE Kowmung River to Kanangra Walls, that I resolved to make 2007 my year of the Kowmung. How long did I have before creaking knees and straining muscles found the 800 metre climb just too much? There were favourite spots to revisit at leisure, sections I hadn't done for decades, even some stretches I didn't remember ever having walked.

By Easter 2007, however, my plans hadn't gone as well as I'd hoped. An eagerly anticipated Christmas–New Year trip didn't eventuate. In March, a walk through Bulga Denis Canyon, between Christys Creek and Orange Bluff, was most enjoyable, despite grey skies and bursts of rain. A few months later, our Easter trip downstream from Dicksonia Spur and back up Christys Creek ripped through misty memories of leisurely loops and grassy, casuarina-lined banks as mile after prickly mile of invasive blackthorn bushes tore at my skin. But there was one delightful stretch at Broken Point which I was keen to revisit—a large pool backed by a quartzite cliff with plenty of good camping on the opposite bank.

Now I had to work out how to get there on a three-day weekend, allowing enough time to relax and drink in the ambience. I ruled out yet

another start from Kanangra on the northern side of the river and decided to leave the cars at Batsh Camp on the southern side. That way I could cover some new territory by doing a day walk up the Inglis Selection Track to Kowmung Mountain, and on the return journey of the final day traverse Mt Colong, whose 1047 metre summit overlooks the southern Blue Mountains.

The opportunity didn't arise until the October long weekend. With a forecast of fine though windy weather for three days, our party of seven women and one far from token male set out on Friday night in high spirits for the three-and-a-bit hour drive. The length of the 'bit' depends on the speed at which the driver is prepared to tackle the potholes and dodge the wombats on the winding Mt Werong Road, the final section of the drive into Batsh Camp. This unusual name, also euphemistically spelt 'Bats' or Batsch', derives from the bat droppings that were carried here from Colong Caves during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Today, it's a pretty spot with good camping on grassy patches beneath the tall gums. I decided not to put up my fly, a decision I didn't regret when Ann woke in the morning to find hers blown down around her feet.

We set off early as we had a long day ahead of us. I'd already changed my mind several times about which route to take across the plateau to the south of Mt Colong in order to reach the 1961 Limestone Road. This road



was built out to Mt Armour during those tense times when the threat of mining the local limestone was very real. We could cross Bent Hook Swamp, climb Kooragang Mountain and drop off the eastern side at Morton Head, or else walk up Kooragang Swamp and past Barralliers Pass to descend at Mt Meier. Though I finally decided on the latter option it was not to be. Engrossed in conversation and confident of a compass route I had followed several times before, I suddenly realised the country didn't match our presumed location on the map. Surely that little creek we had crossed with dry feet was a stream in a side gully and not Bindook Creek, even though we had bashed through 50 metres of tea tree on either side of it?

'Should we check the GPS?' mused Keith. 'No', we agreed tentatively, then, 'Yes, perhaps it would be a good idea.' It was just as well we did, as we had not only crossed the swamp, but were part way up the slope on the other side. The best option now was to continue up to the cliffline

We soon hit the road under Byrnes Bluff, sidling a dry Colong Swamp and passing through Squatting Rock Gap on the way to Mt Armour. We paused only to admire the spring flowers and a particularly fine view of Chiddy Obelisk, a sandstone remnant seen across the valley of Church Creek, rising from a gap on the narrow ridge between Mt Yuburra and Kowmung Mountain. And what were those telltale bumps on the horizon but Rick, Rack, Roar and Rumble, the final gasps on the ridge from Kanangra Walls to the summit of Mt Cloudmaker?

At Mt Armour the road narrows to a track which drops steeply 250 metres to Church Creek.

Left, Geoff Vercoe descending the quartzite ridge from Sombre Dome to the Kowmung River.

Below, walking along the Uni Rover Trail from Kanangra, on the way to Sombre Dome and the Kowmung River.

Bottom, the early morning light filters through the trees at a campsite in a hidden valley near the Kowmung River.

All uncredited photographs by the author



and follow it south until we found a way through, which could be quite a distance. But we were in luck, for after 100 metres or so I glanced up to see Keith at the top of a steep crack looking pleased. We were soon all on top, then, taking more care, we navigated through the trees across Kooragang Mountain and out along the dog-leg spur to Morton Head.

As the ridge narrowed and the scrub gave way to extensive rock platforms, we caught views of the surrounding country. Mt Colong, its basalt summit perched above a sandstone plinth, was of particular interest to us, since we expected to return over it in two days' time. It didn't look so impressive when the top was only 250 metres above us, although we knew it would be a big haul out of the Kowmung. More spectacular were Square Rock, Mootik Plateau and many other examples of the cliffed sandstone hills and ridges which characterise the southern Blue Mountains.

We scrambled down a pass in the cliff about 50 metres back from the end of Morton Head, crashing through fallen timber and letting loose a rock which fortunately missed those below. From Bulls Gap beneath Morton Head we took a compass bearing to the road as it passed by Egans Swamp, cutting across two fences and a maze of bush tracks on the way. A sunny, grassy bank beside a dry creek-bed overhung with golden wattles provided a pleasant place to stop for lunch; some of the regrowth was thicker than expected and I'd underestimated the time it would take to navigate the off-track sections of the walk.



By now it was mid-afternoon and indigo shadows were creeping into the folds of the Kowmung Valley, though the sun was still warming the dark limestone of Cathedral Rocks as we reached the grassy clearing of the old Inglis Selection. Church Creek nearby looked dry and there were groans at the thought of having to continue another kilometre to the Kowmung, but Keith still had the energy to investigate and found a few pools a little way upstream. So we stayed put at the first of the weekend's two beautiful campsites.



The summit at last! The party beneath the cairn on top of Mt Colong. Clockwise from left: Zabeta Moutafis, Ann Gibbs-Jordan, Keith Thomas, Nicola Taylor, Alana Taylor, Irene Davies, Lorraine Tomlins.

Next morning we set off with light day packs up Church Creek. A patch of delicate greenhood orchids provided some compensation for the scratchy blackthorn bushes which had overrun the banks. Our ordeal in the creek was soon over as we reached our spur and followed what remained of the Inglis Selection Track which was now overgrown. After the first steep 100 metres, it narrowed to an interesting quartzite ridge where bright yellow peas glowed against the pale-grey rocky outcrops. As we climbed higher, our view expanded to take in the steep, cliffed spurs around us and the horizontal line of cliffs which marked Kowmung Mountain, Chiddy Obelisk, Mt Yuburna, Mt Marrup and Swamp Head Mountain, the broken ridgeline sweeping around to the south to be surmounted by the bulk of Mt Colong. We rested on a convenient log and discussed what to do next. Though we all intended to return to camp down Blue-bush Ridge, Keith decided to continue up the 'track' on his own to Kowmung Mountain for a closer view of Chiddy Obelisk.

'You'll easily catch up with us', I said. 'I won't have any trouble hearing you', was the laconic reply. He found a way through the cliff to Kowmung Mountain but had to take care not to be blown off its narrow tail since the wind, which had died down overnight, was strengthening again into gale-force gusts. Meanwhile, we women were discovering the probable origin of the name 'Blue Bush Ridge' as we passed groves of purple mint bushes flowering profusely amongst the ironbarks on the ridge.

Back at our campsite at Church Creek, we had a quick lunch, packed up and moved west across a saddle to the Kowmung, reaching a broken cliff overlooking the river near a hairpin bend. Keith decided to keep his

feet dry by clambering around the steep slope on the outside of the bend, thus avoiding two river crossings. He wasn't completely on his own, though. Close to the water, a red-bellied black snake, none too keen to move, was basking on a rock which Keith needed to step on.

'I poked it off with a stick', he told us later; then, in response to our horrified looks, 'It was a long stick'.

The rest of us followed an animal pad diagonally down to the river and sloshed across. Though the current was flowing well, the drought had certainly lowered the water level. Then all we had to do was to cut across Murdock's Spur and cross the river again to the grassy stretch on the other side. Here we surprised a sow and two piglets who quickly disappeared upstream. By mid-afternoon we were at our destination for the night, a lovely spot amongst the casuarinas opposite the high quartzite cliff at Broken Point. The pool was deep and long enough for a swim, but those who braved the cold didn't linger. No wonder Keith's snake was reluctant to stay in the water!

The wind sprang up again and blew down a tent or two, forcing the owners to find more sheltered spots amongst some bushes a short way downstream. I opted for a night under the stars, trusting the weather forecast. We enjoyed a dry, perfectly calm night, the brightness of the moonlit sky dimmed by overarching casuarina branches.

Before we retired to bed, we had a lively evening around the campfire. Zabeta was intent on learning more about lightweight bush cuisine and expertly interviewed us all, applying the taste test to make sure the offer-



ings were palatable. There was Lorraine's couscous with spicy dahl, my home-cooked and dehydrated beef musaman with basmati rice, and Keith and Irene's alpine spaghetti, flavoured with fresh garlic, Mediterranean herbs and parmesan cheese. Ann had her own version of alpine spaghetti, Nicky and her daughter Alana had picked up a packet of South African bobotie at a sale, and Zabeta herself had brought a heat-in-boiling-water sachet of exotic Indian vegetables. We all agreed we could present quite a passable TV foodie program—well, a half-hour episode maybe.

With our longest day ahead of us, we were up early again the next morning, filling up water bottles in preparation for a hot, dry 900 metre climb. Donnelly's Ridge was one of those scrub-free shale ridges that make walking in the Blue Mountains such a delight, with the added bonus of large fallen logs that provided tempting resting places long enough to seat the whole party comfortably. As we reached Mt Millo, the top of Mt Colong with its north-facing cliff became visible through the trees, but

this Dunphy-esque blip on the ridge had its downside, in the form of a deep, scrubby saddle between it and the Mt Armour Road. Taking care not to follow the obvious spur that swings around to the north and ends up in Donnelly's Creek, we dropped into the saddle, clutching at bushes to brake our descent, then sweated up the other side to the road. We welcomed the wind, which kept us from overheating, though it was strong enough to blow Nicky over when a gust caught her with one foot raised.

We weren't on the road for long. Opposite Tonalli Gap we headed into the scrub, climbing a steep spur to the sandstone plinth that surrounds Mt Colong. The easiest route through the cliffline is a scramble about 50 metres south-west of the spur's crest. On the north-east ridge of Colong, Irene and I took a short detour up on to a sandstone outcrop and were rewarded with one of the best views of the trip—to Yerranderie Peak and Mootik Plateau, past Square Rock and way beyond to the distant walls of the Wollondilly Valley, aglow in the afternoon sun.

At last we were at the final stretch of the climb, the 250 metres up the basalt cap to the summit. We paused on the ascent to catch glimpses of spectacular views through the trees. The number of familiar landmarks we could see was a revelation. Then we walked across the grassy top with its tall trees to the impressive cairn, at least four metres high, and examined the logbook for signatures of people we knew, including our own from previous trips. There weren't many recent entries.

With only three-and-a-half hours to dark, it was time to get going. However, as we broke out of the trees on to the steep basalt scree slope



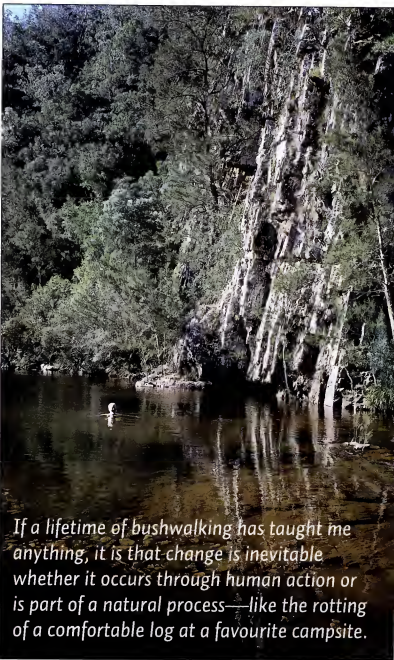
that descends to narrow Colong Causeway, we had to stop and admire from on high the remarkable view over the upper Kowmung and the flat, sandstone fingers projecting from the plateau below us. Then we were on the move again, carefully negotiating loose boulders and avoiding the viney undergrowth by sticking to the crest. Once down, Keith took us quickly through the scrub across Kooragang Mountain and down an obvious break in the cliffline, then across Bent Hook Swamp to the road. We were too tired to do anything other than follow the road as it curved around the swamp, and reached the cars just on sunset after a ten-and-a-half hour day.

Three weeks later I was back on the Kowmung again. This time we walked in from the Kanangra side, along the Uni Rover Trail and down the broken quartzite spur from Sombre Dome. It is only from here that you gain a true impression of the full height of Mt Colong as its surrounding ridges rise from deep within the valley of the Kowmung to culminate in that characteristic high, flat top. After four kilometres along the river, we climbed out up Despond Ridge and back on to the Uni Rover Trail. At Lost Rock we had our final view of Mt Colong, clearly delineated against its backdrop of Wollondilly cliffs by a sun already low in the western sky.

So how does the Kowmung of today match up with my recollections of several decades ago? Memories are notoriously unreliable. We no longer share campsites with piles of cow dung, although feral pigs have destroyed many flat, grassy banks and blackthorn has overtaken long stretches of the river. The drought has decreased the flow of water to the point where it's now not unusual to cross with dry feet. Even more destructive, perhaps, has been the effect of land clearing in the upper reaches—after heavy rain, the Kowmung becomes a torrent of liquid mud which coats the rocks in its bed with a brown, silty skin. Am I wrong in remembering a pristine waterway like Christys Creek, its waters sparkling clear and glowing with the

natural colours of the rock? If a lifetime of bushwalking has taught me anything, it is that change is inevitable whether it occurs through human action or is part of a natural process—like the rotting of a comfortable log at a favourite campsite.

Yet the Kowmung River remains a lifeline threading through its rugged gorges. Birds of many species sing throughout the day and strange



If a lifetime of bushwalking has taught me anything, it is that change is inevitable whether it occurs through human action or is part of a natural process—like the rotting of a comfortable log at a favourite campsite.

calls, croaks, howls and rustles interrupt the peace of the night. There is something very special about the sighing of the wind in the casuarinas, the sparkle of sun on rapids, the reflections of trees and rocks in a tranquil pool, the gathering blue shadows in the folds of its ridges. My year of the Kowmung has confirmed my hope to go on visiting this lovely river and its spectacular surrounds for many years to come. 🐼

Keith Thomas takes a chilly dip at Broken Point on the Kowmung River. *Left*, seven women resting on a log on Donnelly's Ridge. Keith Thomas

Meg McKane has been a keen bushwalker since childhood. She is making the most of her retirement by fitting in as much as possible. She especially enjoys poring over maps to work out new and interesting routes. In 1962 McKane was the first woman to complete the Three Peaks in the Blue Mountains (see *Wild* no 69).

Stepping Stones



Jonathan Smith outlines moving from bushwalking to mountaineering

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO GET INTO THE REALLY BIG HILLS? IF SO, READ ON.

Where do I start?

Many bushwalkers perceive mountaineering as dangerous and extreme—an activity in an exponentially riskier environment, requiring an abundance of technical expertise. Yet many of the skills required to safely climb a snow-capped peak are the same as those used to navigate through the bush.

So how do people progress from being active bushwalkers to mountaineers? What knowledge and experience is required to move from

the valleys to the snow-capped peaks? Learning some rockclimbing skills through a local climbing club (such as a university- or state-based club) or at the local climbing gym is a good place to start, and provides a foundation for the more advanced rope-handling techniques taught by mountaineering instructors. You may already be familiar with some knots, but becoming proficient in the use of some of the more common knots—figure of eight, bowline, alpine butterfly and Italian hitch—and knowing when they should be used is one of the first steps for budding mountaineers. Learning how to climb moderate grades will also help in the mountains, while reading a few basic mountaineering books will give you the confidence and knowledge to head off in the right direction.

Patagonia's FitzRoy, object of dreams and nightmares. All uncredited photos by Mathew Farrell



Is it worthwhile doing a course?

The focus of most mountaineering courses is on safety education, travel on and awareness of all types of mountain terrain, rather than on pure technical climbing. The best place for mountaineering courses is New Zealand's Southern Alps. They are not cheap at about \$3000 for ten days but for people who can't find an experienced mentor they provide a solid platform of knowledge and skills.

I learned so much on the first day of my Alpine course that I thought my head would explode. I learned how to tie knots, rescue myself if I fell in a crevasse, use an ice axe and arrest myself from a fall. It's a steep learning curve, but given the stakes, one that I was keen to climb as soon as possible.

Basic mountaineering courses usually cover belaying, movement on easy to moderate terrain, shelters, navigation, weather and route finding. They are designed to balance

technical instruction with practical application in realistic situations. Mountaineering courses are usually run with the expectation that you have some basic rockclimbing experience, so getting along to the local crag or climbing gym to learn the fundamentals beforehand will be a huge advantage.

Recently I found myself putting theory into practice, when my friends and I were forced to dig a snow-cave. For well over an hour our ice axes were swinging in a torch-lit frenzy. By the time we had finished all we could do was fall into our sleeping bags.

What challenges exist in an alpine environment?

Stepping into an alpine environment presents many challenges. Weather is often more unpredictable, drinking water less accessible, and route finding can be difficult in low light or white-out conditions. Access to communications and rescue services is more restricted and the packs carried by

mountaineers are often heavier than those carried by bushwalkers. The harsh, cold mountain environment requires more gear and more clothing layers to be carried, as well as more food for cooking and melting water.

In Nepal I had a rude shock when my camp stove failed to light. It was my first time above 4000 metres and I'd just found out the hard way that compressed gas stoves work high up, whereas many liquid fuel stoves simply give up the ghost.

Getting access to good local information is vital before attempting a climb. Snow and ice conditions, not to mention weather patterns, should be checked regularly. However, for the keen bushwalker getting beta on the local conditions is nothing new.

One time in New Zealand a few mates and I spent a few hours pushing our way up the Mueller Glacier, starting in bitter cold and progressing to intense sunshine, stripping down to shorts and shirts, before finally arriving at our snow-blanketed destination in near white-out conditions.

How fit do I need to be?

Mountaineers require higher levels of aerobic fitness, stamina and strength than bushwalkers. This is usually due to the steepness of slopes, length of the days (being on your feet for 10-12 hours is not uncommon), and thinner air at altitude.

Like most things, preparation is the key. As much as I disliked grinding up the local hills with a 30 kilogram pack before my trip to the Andes, it allowed me to focus my energy on the technical aspects of the climbing rather than on fitness.

Extended walks help to build the strength and stamina for tackling alpine challenges. Getting used to walking on uneven, rocky terrain will help to build up the stabilising muscles in your trunk and legs. Adding extra weight to your rucksack while walking up and down local hills will help to simulate the extra effort required of your body at higher altitude or on steep slopes.

What sort of gear will I need?

Many bushwalkers may be put off by the amount of gear, not to mention the cost, required to become a safe mountaineer. Sure, mountaineering gear is not cheap, especially in Australia, so it's worth shopping around. It is generally not worth the hassle and the risk of buying second-hand gear, although some bits of gear are safer than others; for example boots and shell wear. Similarly most mountaineers are loath to borrow hardware for the simple reason that they don't know where it has been. Did someone drop that karabiner on a climb? Has anyone fallen on that rope? The most important pieces of mountaineering equipment for the novice mountaineer are boots, ice axe, rope, harness, climbing hardware and crampons. Mountaineering boots are often the single biggest expense. They have a rigid sole designed specifically for crampons, which means that they don't flex like normal walking boots, and require a

I learned so much on the first day of my Alpine course that I thought my head would explode. I learned how to tie knots, rescue myself if I fell in a crevasse, use an ice axe and arrest myself from a fall.

Left, heavily laden, Tim Billington pushes on through day two of his Mt St Elias climb, Alaska. **Right,** Mathew Farrell rapidly running out of ice on FitzRoy's Supercanaleta, Patagonia. *Tim Billington*

different stride that takes a little time to get used to. On very easy routes it's possible to use sturdy leather walking boots, but on the majority of climbs it is necessary to wear boots that are suitable for crampons. Boots and crampons come in various configurations but it is extremely important that crampons are fitted to your boots by a store specialist. An ill-fitting crampon is worse than no crampon at all as it can lead you into a false sense of confidence. For high altitude mountaineering, say above 6000 metres, plastic boots are preferred as they usually contain an insulated inner boot making them much warmer than their leather equivalents. Don't forget that your feet tend to swell at altitude so if you plan on getting high, make sure the boots are loose-fitting when you try them on in the store. For your first pair of boots find a store with experienced staff.


I was glad I had splurged on boots as one of my climbing companions had to abort his climb of one of the world's highest mountains, all for the sake of a few bucks, ending up with a pair of woeful thin boots that simply weren't up to the task.

A long-handled ice axe (between 60 and 75 centimetres in length), a thin dynamic rope (between 8 and 10 millimetres in diameter), along with a climbing harness, a handful of screw-gate karabiners, a couple of prusiks (for ascending ropes) and a belay plate will complete the basic mountaineering kit.

But remember, more important than having the right equipment is having the knowledge to use it properly.

What mountains should I be aiming to climb?

Mountaineering need not be technical. Of course there are very technically demanding routes out there to climb, but with some basic technical skills it is possible to attempt routes on many mountains without being a world-class rockclimber. The level of technical difficulty from mountain to mountain, and from route to route on the one mountain, can vary enormously. For example, the two most popular routes leading to the summit of the highest mountain in the Americas, Cerro Aconcagua (6962 metres), involve almost no technical skills. Ice axe and crampons are often not required and 'roping up' is almost unheard of. However, on the opposite side of the same mountain, the steep South Face lends itself to far scarier technical routes such as the Slovene and French Direct routes. There are few opportunities for mountaineering in Australia so many Australians start out in either New Zealand or the Himalayas. New Zealand and the Himalayas both offer an array of routes of various levels of difficulty. The biggest challenge in climbing in the Himalayas is dealing with the thinner air at altitude. A number of the most popular peaks are those designated as trekking peaks, the most popular amongst them being Mera Peak, Imja Tse (Island Peak) and Lobuche East.

Wherever you decide to venture, it's a good idea to use the services of a qualified mountain guide for your first one or two outings. 

Being a sucker for true tales of endurance, Jonathan Smith has been inspired to walk, climb and scuba dive at a lot of different places around the globe. He is particularly fond of Latin America. When he's at home in Adelaide, he's a commercial adviser.



Aoraki/Mt Cook: a Beginner's Guide

Tim Billington takes us through all the logistics of mountaineering in New Zealand

THERE IS SOMETHING INSPIRING ABOUT THE DRIVE INTO AORAKI/MT Cook National Park. The road towards the looming peaks of New Zealand's highest mountains winds its way around the shores of Lake Pukaki—the water a milky, almost unnatural aqua hue. As you approach the main divide, you are forced to look out and up, trying to take in the scale of the hills. It's almost overwhelming. Coupled with an old Crowded House CD blaring from the radio, the beauty of the landscape closing in around is almost suffocating. From the comfort of the car, it's easy to lose perspective of the scale of what's on offer. As a repeat visitor to the area, it's not until I spot a known point—a past route or hut site perhaps—that the sheer size of the mountains sinks in.

Despite the magnitude of the mountains in Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, the area is an outstanding place for the beginner mountaineer. The park is reasonably compact and access to a wide variety of climbs is fairly straightforward. Although relatively small when compared with other national parks, this World Heritage Area contains 22 of New Zealand's 27 mountains over 3050 metres. Simply put, this creates an awesome environment where a lot of big mountains are packed into a small area—vertical gain is what it's all about.

But where does a beginner climber start? From Australia, travelling overseas can appear to be a daunting move to make for climbing. If cutting your teeth in an alpine environment is what you want to do, then Aoraki is often a good place to begin. Firstly, being the

centre of New Zealand mountaineering, the park has a nice, laid-back atmosphere during the summer climbing season. Mt Cook Village is a good base. This is not typically the case in other popular climbing areas such as Wanaka, where the town is a considerable distance from any mountains. Access into the mountains is also particularly easy from Mt Cook Village when compared with other areas. Regular buses run from Christchurch or, alternatively, it's an easy drive or hitch. Once in the village, it's quite possible to get by without a car and still access the surrounding area. Another great aspect of Aoraki is that there is something to suit everyone. Long snow plods, steep ice, alpine rock—it's all there. Level of difficulty also varies from easy alpine walks to the toughest rock and ice routes in New Zealand.



Before you go

Alpine climbing in New Zealand is significantly different from rockclimbing and bushwalking. Techniques are different, new skills are needed, specific equipment is required and it's important to remember that Australia doesn't have real mountains. Arrange to climb with experienced friends who are prepared to teach. Otherwise, there are multitudes of courses available from professional guides. Experience takes time to develop and doesn't come overnight.

Getting there

Flying to Christchurch is both cheap and easy. However, the logistics of getting to Mt Cook Village become a little trickier. Christchurch Airport is fairly close to the city centre and it will cost about \$NZ30 by taxi to get to the CBD. A bus also runs between the airport and Cathedral Square in the centre of town, costing less than \$NZ10.

To catch a coach directly from Christchurch to Mt Cook Village is expensive and slow. The only option is through Newmans Coach Lines (\$NZ 130). Buses depart from Christchurch Travel Centre at 123 Worcester Street around 7:30 am each morning. Expect the ride to take more than five hours. See www.newmanscoach.co.nz for more information.

A cheaper and less tedious alternative exists with some smaller bus operators including Southern Link Shuttles and Atomic Shuttles. Atomic Shuttles depart Christchurch daily at 7:30 am and hotel pick-up can be arranged. The ride will take you as far as Twizel (eight kilometres to the



South of the Aoraki/Mt Cook Road) in less than four hours. This should cost around \$NZ40. See www.atomicttravel.co.nz for timetable information. A connecting bus can then be caught to Mt Cook Village from Twizel with The Cook Connection (www.cookconnect.co.nz) for about \$NZ30. Otherwise, hitchhiking a ride from Twizel to Mt Cook Village is pretty easy.

For those on a very tight budget, hitchhiking from Christchurch to Aoraki is not too complicated, as New Zealand is fairly hitchhiker friendly. If you're planning to stay in New Zealand for a while, it may be good value to buy a car. A cheap car might only set you back \$NZ500 to \$NZ1000. Registration is cheap and can be purchased in three-month blocks if desired. A Warrant Of Fitness (equivalent of a roadworthy assessment) is required every six months for maintaining registration. For those no longer on a shoestring budget but tight on time, renting a car may be the best option. My preference has been to use Renny Rent-A-Car, a friendly small business that offers older cars at good prices. The best arrangement is to get Renny to leave your hired car at the airport for pick-up. See www.rennyrentals.co.nz for details.

Mt Cook Village

At an altitude of 760 metres, Mt Cook Village looks and feels dwarfed by the surrounding ice-capped giants. The village is loosely situated at the foot of the Hooker Valley with easy access to the nearby Tasman Valley. Mt Sefton, at 3151 metres, dominates the immediate view, sounding alive

(owned by the Canterbury Mountaineering Club). Unwin Hut is about two kilometres before Mt Cook Village. The building is large, roomy and has a good number of climbers coming and going. It is close to Mt Cook Airport, which makes it a convenient base for those waiting for charter flights. The hut has good showers, a washing machine, good cooking facilities, Internet, and plenty of beds. Costs are reasonable at \$NZ15 per night for members of the NZAC, and \$NZ25 for non-members. Preference for beds is always given to members. If staying for a while, it is well worth the money to join the Alpine Club (there are also other benefits such as discounted hut fees within Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park and elsewhere). See www.alpineclub.org.nz for more information on the NZAC. Wyn Irwin Hut is the ideal place, especially if you're planning to stay all summer. Located about one kilometre north of the village in the Hooker Valley, the small lodge is basic but homely and social. Visit www.cmc.net.nz for more details.

The Department of Conservation camping ground at White Horse Hill is very basic and



with the continual reverberation of icefall and avalanches. Although spectacularly located, the village suffers from a lack of facilities and things to do during climbing downtime. It is nice to spend time in such a small place, but that feeling can begin to wear thin after a week (or two) of foul weather. A number of good, short walks can easily be done to keep fit and entertained including Red Tarns, Governors Bush, Blue Lakes, Kea Point and the Hooker Valley track.

For climbers there are plenty of routes near the village. The most popular place is on the Mt Sebastopol bluffs east of the village with a variety of bolted routes. Twin Streams (a four-hour walk from Glentanner, 25 kilometres east of Mt. Cook Village) has excellent climbing. On a hot summer day when no climbing is getting done, a swim in the Blue Lakes at the foot of the Tasman Glacier can be the best way to relax.

Accommodation—Mt Cook Village

The ugly and dominating feature of Mt Cook Village is the Hermitage Hotel—better known as 'the Herm'. With mediocre service and over-priced 'prestige' facilities, it tends to be avoided by climbers. A more realistic option is to stay at the excellent, albeit pricey, youth hostel. It does get very busy during the summer months so bookings are often required. Washing and Internet facilities are available for general public use. The newer, although expensive, option is the Aoraki/Mt Cook Alpine Lodge. This semi-backpacker establishment is centrally located and has great facilities. Most climbers end up spending their time at either Unwin Hut, owned by the New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC), or Wyn Irwin Lodge

not great value. The camping ground can become very busy during the summer months.

Eating and drinking

Mt Cook Village has no supermarket—the closest is Twizel. Basic food items can be picked up from the Hermitage and also the youth hostel but expect them to be expensive. The best thing to do is to shop big at Pak'n'Save in Christchurch (on the corner of Manchester Street and Moorhouse Avenue). The Coffee Shop at the Hermitage has a reasonable range of take-away food at inflated prices. A popular item amongst climbers is the coffee or hot chocolate with 'free refill'. It is an ongoing debate as to whether 'free refill' means one refill, or a bottomless mug. Needless to say, it's usually interpreted as meaning the latter. Guide Charlie Hobbs has been successfully running The Old Mountaineers Bar & Café for a number of years. The food is reasonable value for money and the venue has a pleasant atmosphere with an open fireplace. Breakfast, lunch and dinner can be ordered. There is a pool table and Internet facilities. The traditional local haunt, The Chamois Bar, is

From left to right, Tim Billington digs a home for the night in glacial snow. Cam Mulvey and Mike Maddem hanging out in more salubrious accommodation—Gardiner Hut, New Zealand. Tim Billington. The doctor said not to go outside for two weeks. We went climbing as soon as she wasn't looking—Mathew Farrell's battered and frostbitten feet. Tinned peaches in a cold hut.

probably the place to hang out after a climb, but don't expect a raging nightlife.

Department of Conservation (DOC)

The Department of Conservation operates the centrally located Visitor Centre. Up-to-date



William 'the Frenchman' stands atop Aoraki—the cloud piercer—after completing Zurburgens Ridge, Aoraki/Mt Cook. Tim Billington

weather forecasts are available twice a day, along with any other information regarding huts or the park in general. Before venturing out for a climb, the party should 'sign in' to the park with the intended trip. Hut fees (now around the \$NZ20–\$35 mark per night) can be paid at the same time. The sign-in/sign-out system is very effective and keeps track of climbers' movements by a radio schedule to the huts each evening. In the event of an emergency, it's comforting to know that someone is looking out for you. The DOC owns or manages most of the huts within Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, many of which are in spectacularly precarious positions. Huts are a great base from which to climb and many have good, albeit basic, facilities including water, toilets, beds, blankets, radios and cooking utensils. Some of the newer huts also have gas stoves for cooking. Fees aren't cheap but keep in mind the astronomical cost of construction, maintenance and removal of human waste. A cheaper alternative to paying hut fees is to camp outside the hut—check with DOC first whether this is permitted and what it costs. Camping can be hard work in rough weather, and may be an expensive proposition if your tent (or pitching skills) isn't up to a strong nor'wester. If you are camping away from any hut (and not using associated facilities), no fee is applicable.

Alpine Guides

The small Alpine Guides shop stocks a good range of hire equipment as well as essential gear for sale (just in case you drop your axe down the Sheila Face of Cook...). Don't expect a huge range, but if you lose something, at least it can be replaced without a trip to Christchurch. Consumables such as sunscreen and fuel are readily available at reasonable prices.

Charter flights

If money is an issue, walking into the mountains is usually the only option. This provides a rewarding trip and maintains fitness, but can become an arduous task at times. Expect long, hard walks with plenty of moraine bashing in hot conditions.

Flying into the mountain huts is an option when you have a number of climbers, time is limited, and large quantities of food or equipment are required. Fixed-wing aircraft operate from Mt Cook Airport situated on the park boundary. Helicopters are based at nearby Glentanner. As a beginner to the area, don't assume that a flight in and back out will always be possible. Weather conditions will always rule supreme in regard to what can be achieved. Walking in can sometimes be a safer option because then you know the way out if the weather closes in. Landing sites are restricted within the park and prices vary according to distance travelled. Prices are charged per flight and then divided amongst the number of passengers. This means that the most cost-efficient charter will be a full load in, and a full flight back. Staff at Mt Cook Ski Planes and The Helicopter Line are helpful and can provide information on costs and flying conditions. Courtesy pick-up can often be arranged before a flight.

The other little things...

The Hermitage Souvenir Shop acts as a post office and also sells phone cards. Hotel reception can provide EFTPOS facilities for getting cash. If you want to stay connected while away, buy a Vodafone Supa PrePay SIM card when in Christchurch. This will cost about \$NZ35 with some credit. Phone reception is good within the village and can be gained in certain parts of the park. Australian phones work throughout New Zealand.

Guidebooks

Alex Palmer's *Aoraki Mount Cook: a guide for mountaineers* is the 'bible' of routes and information for the area. *Rock Deluxe: a guide to the best crags and boulders in the South Island* by Kate Sinclair and Ivan Vostinar is the most extensive rock-climbing guide to the area, and the whole of the South Island.

Classic routes for the beginner

Mt Annette and Mt Kitchener

A great, easy climb for anyone new to the area. Access is close and straightforward from the village. The climb is non-technical, giving a taste of the alpine environment (without serious commitment), and has outstanding views across the

park. Can be done in one day from the village, or combined with a stopover at Mueller Hut.

Mt Sealy

From Mueller Hut via Sladden Saddle, a trip up Mt Sealy is a long day out. It's a significant peak and will put the fitness to the test if conditions are soft. Crossing the Annette Plateau is good experience for beginners.

Ball Pass

This high alpine pass gives good views of the awesome Caroline Face of Aoraki. Ascend westwards from the Tasman Valley to the privately owned Caroline Hut. The distinctive pass is almost visible from the hut. Descent into the Hooker Valley needs to be navigated correctly but is not difficult.

The Footstool

The nemesis of many climbers, the Footstool is perhaps the most attempted mountain after Aoraki. Access is easy from the village to Sefton Bivvy. This climb entails crossing glaciated terrain and sits square on the main divide—making it exposed to changing weather. The Main Divide route is the most common, but is somewhat more difficult than the climbs mentioned above.

Note on 'beginner routes'—All new climbers visiting an extreme alpine environment such as Aoraki/Mt Cook should exercise the utmost caution and always act well within their ability. Numerous climbers, both novice and highly experienced, have died within the park on all types of routes, including those listed above. Mountaineering in Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park is an incredible experience; play it safe so that you can return. ☹

Melbourne based Tim Billington attempts to climb when not studying or working. Unfortunately, his growing mountaineering photo collection tends to only show 'attempted routes' rather than summits. When in Aoraki, he normally spends his time sifting at Wyn Irwin Lodge.

Australasian Guides

For further information on courses and training Wild recommends you check out some of the following web sites:

Adventure Consultants Limited

www.adventureconsultants.co.nz

Alpine Guides www.alpineguides.co.nz

Alpine Recreation

www.alpinerecreation.com

Alpinism and Ski www.alpinismski.co.nz

Aspiring Guides www.aspiringguides.com

Australian School of Mountaineering

www.asmguides.com

DCXP Mountain Journeys www.dcxp.com

Field Touring Alpine

www.fieldtouring.com

Fox Guides www.foxguides.co.nz

High Country Expeditions

www.highcountrynz.com

Mountain Recreation

www.mountainrec.co.nz

New Zealand Wild Walks

www.wildwalks.co.nz

Southern Alps Guiding www.mtcook.com

Summits Mountain Guiding

www.summits.co.nz

Sunrock Mountain & Ski Guides

www.sunrock.com

World Expeditions

www.worldexpeditions.com.au

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Beeripmo Walk

Greg Caire takes us on a diverse bushwalk in central Victoria



TUCKED AWAY IN THE CREVICES AND FOLDS OF VICTORIA'S MT COLE State Forest and Mt Buangor State Park lies a bushwalk of high quality known as the Beeripmo Walk. Much effort has been expended by Parks Victoria and the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) to provide a varied and interesting two-day circuit with walker-specific facilities and discreet (yet informative) signage and track markers. The route is set up as a loop starting and finishing at Richards Camp Ground in the Mt Cole State Forest. This makes it ideal for a weekend trip from Melbourne, and there are other side walks and sights that could easily turn the trip into a three-day outing for those with time to kill.

The walk was officially opened on 4 October 2002, and derives its name from the Beeripmo balug clan of Aborigines who occupied the Mt Cole area. The name Beeripmo loosely translates to 'wild mount', in reference to Mt Cole. Graphics on the markers and track signage were designed by a local Aboriginal artist. The walk gains significant altitude and occasionally meanders through subalpine forests of snow gums and snow grass, giving spectacular views from various rocky vantage points of Mt Langi Ghiran, the Grampians and the western plains of Victoria. The region was extensively logged from the 1840s onwards. However, the forests

have recovered significantly in many places, producing occasional scrubby patches but overall providing a satisfying walking experience of high quality.

When to go

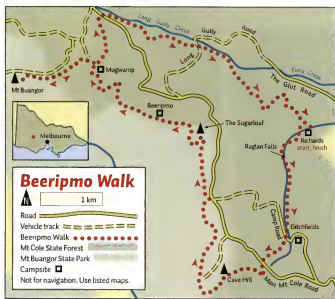
The walk can be done any time of the year, but it is best to avoid the height of summer (late January to February) due to significant bushfire risk. In winter there can be occasional snowfalls on the higher points (Mt Buangor sits at 987 m) so be prepared with four-season tents and clothing at these times.

Safety/Warnings

As the campsites are generally surrounded by forest, try to pick a tent site safe from any tree limbs that might fall during strong windy conditions.

Further reading

Bushwalking In Australia fourth Edition John and Monica Chapman (2003). *Beeripmo Walk* (Forests Notes, Department of Sustainability and Environment, January 2004), gives excellent walk details and a useful



single-page map covering the whole walk, including newer track sections not shown in the Vicmap Topographic Map datum.

Permits

No permits are currently required for the Beeripmo Walk and no bookings system exists for campsites at the walkers only Beeripmo Camp, and the various car-based camps (including Richards Camp Ground and Mugwamp Camp).

Access

Take the Western Highway from Melbourne to Beaufort in Central Victoria. Turn right at the public toilet block at the west end of town and cross the railway line to the north, following the signs to Cave Hill in the Mt Cole State Forest, eventually ending up at Richards Camp Ground (the start and finish of the walk). It has toilet facilities, barbecues and tank water,

The walk at a glance

Grade	Easy to moderate
Length	Two days
Distance	21.5 kilometres, 11.5 hours
Type	Circuit walk through forested valleys past subalpine peaks
Region	Central Victoria
Nearest towns	Beaufort
Start, finish	Richards Camp Ground, Mt Cole State Forest
Maps	Vicmap Beaufort North 1:25 000 and Vicmap Buangor North 1:25 000 topographic maps, and the DSE Forests Notes sheet Beeripmo Walk (available from the Tourist Information Centre, Beaufort).
Best time	March to October
Special points	The walk passes through tall blue gum, manna gum and messmate forests. Caution should be taken with falling branches, particularly during storms. Do not camp under large branches if at all avoidable.

Previous page, Julie Bishop picking her way through the granite country high on the southern flanks of Mt Buangor, above the site of a now disused hanglider launch site.

Left, subalpine forest encountered on day two of the Beeripmo Walk, as the track follows the route of an old reclaimed forestry trail (the Firebreak Track) set aside for revegetation.

Above, extensive views out towards farms surrounding Beaufort in central Victoria; Julie takes a break on the approach walk to Mt Buangor's tree-covered summit cairn.

All photographs by the author



If you're planning to head off the beaten track in the Pyrenees, we can help.

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and makes a convenient camp if you arrive at the start of the walk on a Friday night.

The walk

Richards Camp Ground to Beeripmo Camp (8.5 kilometres, 4.5 hours)

The Beeripmo Walk takes a meandering route through a variety of landscapes, including for-

The Cave.) After two kilometres the track splits at an overgrown and indistinct junction, leading to the scrubby Sugarloaf Picnic Ground. The endemic Mt Cole Grevillea is found in this area. Head north, climbing slowly up to the ridge to just below the granite tors of The Sugarloaf, following the track as it switches back and forth through the cliffs and outcrops to the Sugarloaf

junction at the base of Mugwamp Hill, take a left turn and head north along the Mt Buangor Lookout side track. The track sidles west and crosses some granite slabs before heading along an old fire track to end at a car park (there was previously a hang glider launch site here). Head uphill for 50 metres for a great lunch spot and extensive views to the south. Continue west



Julie arranges gear on one of the wooden platforms provided at the well laid-out Beeripmo walkers-only campsite, just off the Firebreak Track.

ested valleys, tree fern gullies, subalpine ridges and granite outcrops. The track's distinctive signage is relatively frequent and clearly visible. From Richards Camp Ground the walk is well signposted to the first notable feature, Raglan Falls. Follow the signposts from Richards Camp Ground, turning left at the base of the steps and then heading south-west. Continue uphill through gullies filled with tree ferns beside Cave Hill Creek. The track climbs steadily and skirts the base of the granite buttresses below Raglan Falls, ascending a steep little pinch to the top of the falls. The cliff edge is now fenced off with a stainless steel and wire barrier. A small side track follows the creek upstream for a couple of hundred metres to Rob Falls (dry during the drought), where the track crosses Cave Hill Creek and heads up through dry eucalypt forest, before crossing Camp Road. Continue south-west to climb steadily to Mt Cole Road. Follow the signposts and continue climbing towards the west, eventually reaching the summit of Cave Hill and its snow grass and subalpine forest. There are extensive views along the route through the trees to Mt Langi Ghiran, Mt Cole and farms on the plains; however, the Cave Hill summit itself is covered in trees. Head south-west over some large granite slabs with further panoramic views before dropping down to Cave Hill Road, heading north on a long, steady climb. (An indistinct side track drops down left from here to a granite feature called

summit, marked by a cairn). Further on are sweeping views back to Cave Hill and the earlier section of the day's walk. A short distance further along, keep right at the marked track junction and descend to Firebreak Track, heading left for half a kilometre to the designated Beeripmo Camp. This is a walkers' only camp with tank water and toilets. The campsites scattered amongst the trees have wooden sitting platforms and fireplaces.

Day 2:

Beeripmo Camp to Richards Camp Ground (13 kilometres, seven hours)


Head north-west through tall forest on the old vehicle track (Firebreak Track) from Beeripmo Camp. The track crosses a saddle and a number of old fire tracks, meandering south-west on its climb to the top of Mugwamp Hill. After passing a lookout the track drops down to the bottom of Mugwamp Hill and the main track divides. To the left is the out and return walk to Mt Buangor.

Side trip:

Mt Buangor Lookout (3.5 kilometres, 2.5 hours return)

This side trip is described in the DSE track notes as a loop track (marked by Beeripmo Track signage and markers), but it is actually an out and back excursion to the Mt Buangor Lookout, which involves backtracking to the main Beeripmo Walk track junction from where it starts. From the track

from here going uphill along a faint track to the summit of Mt Buangor, which is forested and marked by a very large cairn. Retrace your steps to rejoin the Beeripmo Walk at the junction.

Continue on the Beeripmo main track north-east for about 300 metres to a fire track; Mugwamp Camp is a short distance to the left and is a good lunch spot, with picnic tables, a toilet and an old tin hut. After crossing the road continue past a creek north-east over a twisting wooden boardwalk which passes through the marshy ground surrounding the creek. The track continues past Dawson Rock, a large granite slab, and drops gently down through dry forest to Mt Cole Road. Head north-east along the track into the steep-sided valley of Long Gully, where very tall eucalypts still stand, and continue along this for just over a kilometre to cross Long Gully Road. Follow the track steeply down to the creek flowing through Long Gully and cross a side creek under several tall tree ferns, later heading up south-east and across several steep-sided gullies to meet the Grevillea Track (which heads to Richards Camp Ground). Follow Grevillea Track for one kilometre back to the start. 

Greg Carr is a photographer, walker and climber who was introduced to the Blue Mountains as a wide-eyed schoolboy. He has climbed, cycled and walked in South America, Central and South-east Asia, the UK and USA. His next adventure lies exploring the mountains, sands and oases of the Middle East.



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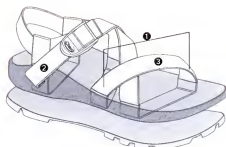


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Respecting your Elders

Robert Lamp describes a two- or three-day walk exploring the ancient Elder Range while climbing Mt Aleck in South Australia's Flinders Ranges

WALKING THROUGH SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S FLINDERS RANGES YOU ARE always aware of being in an ancient land. Formed from the compressed sediments of a vanished seabed, the rock strata of the ranges were thrust skyward over millennia by the drift of the earth's crust, then eroded by the sun and the outback wind.

This is an old place even within the limited span of humanity. At the cave site of Yourambulla, half an hour's drive south of the start of this walk, the Andnyamartha left cave paintings at a point commanding sweeping views of the land—images of prey, animals, initiation circles, hand prints and abstract patterns cover the overhanging walls. If you sit quietly, listening to the wind through the surrounding pines, and watch the cloud shadows pass over the empty hills, it is easy to feel a connection with the people who made these images. Their choice of this place suggests an appreciation of beauty very close to our own, separated by 40 000 years.

We may share a common sensibility with the Andnyamartha, but we don't see the same landscape. Despite its evident age this is a fragile place; in only a century, overgrazing across the north-west pastoral district has left little but stubble, saltbush and bare, rounded hills. In contrast to the grazing country, the original vegetation has been preserved in the ranges, where eucalyptus scrub, acacia, casuarina and pine thrive on slopes too steep and remote for sheep and cattle. Twisted red gums flourish in the major creeks, interspersed with the tall, elegant forms of pale sugar gums. The dry, open faces of the hillsides are dotted with two of the hardest plants in nature: needle-pointed spinifex and the droughtproof, fire-resistant, long-lived yacca. Either of these two tough customers would be a suitable emblem for this unforgiving country.

When to go

From May to October the daytime temperature is usually comfortably below 30°C; at night it is close to 0°C. The Heyesen Trail, which provides the access route for this walk, is closed from 1 November to 30 April every year because of fire risk.

Safety

Water is the key consideration. Even in winter you cannot rely on local water supplies, so consult the National Parks & Wildlife Service at Wilpena ([08] 8648 4244) for general information. You should call Arkaba



A panoramic setting for a camp: waking to the sunrise over Moralan valley. Below, Phil Tindale on the summit ridge of the Elder Range. Both photos by the author



Station ([08] 8648 4195) to get permission to camp along the section of the Heysen Trail which runs through their property at the base of the Elder Range. The climb of Mt Aleck itself is very tough in places. Under no circumstances should you walk alone, or with inadequate water, food or sun protection.

Map

The SA Department of Lands Moralana 1:50 000 sheet covers the Elder Range and the area traversed by the Heysen Trail in this region.

Further reading

Terry Lavender's lovingly written *The Heysen Trail—A Walker's Guide* (Bookends, Adelaide, 2000) covers the access track for the walk.

The walk at a glance

Grade	Hard
Length	Two to three days
Distance	45–50 kilometres
Type	Semi-arid mountain terrain, no established tracks on the climb
Region	Flinders Ranges, South Australia
Nearest town	Hawker
Start, finish	Moralana Scenic Drive
Best time	May to August
Special points	You must be able to navigate and have the experience to plan and safely complete a difficult walk through remote, and country. Fire restrictions apply from 1 December to 1 March

Access

The Flinders Ranges are five hours north of Adelaide on Highway 32. At Quorn, take the right-hand fork towards Hawker. Heading north on this stretch of bitumen, the jagged blue line of the Elder Range will rise on the horizon, with the southern wall of Wilpena Pound just behind. The Yourambulla turn-off is signposted on the left along this section of road. At Hawker, take the Wilpena road for 29 kilometres until you cross Eating House Creek. The Moralana Scenic Drive (the vestige of a nineteenth-century cattle drive) is signposted on your left. Look for a red track marker 15 kilometres from the turn-off, where the Heysen Trail intersects Moralana Drive.

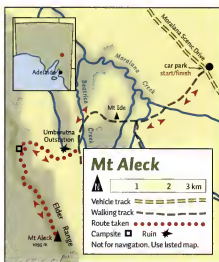
The walk

From the roadside the Elder Range is laid out to the west, a daunting mountain wall rising

high above the intervening hills. Mt Aleck is the central high point on the razor-back summit ridge.

Follow the Heysen Trail from the roadside car park over a stile and through sparse thickets of kangaroo thorn. The track joins a station track that crosses Moralana Creek, skirts south of conical Mt Ide, and passes a stockyard and bore. The track curves first north, then west, before turning south to a second fence and another stile. Follow the markers through scattered native pines to Umberutna Outstation. The old stockman's quarters have fallen into ruin: two piles of stone beside the banks of a dry creek are all that remains.

Leave the Heysen Trail and head south-west from Umberutna across the open rolling ground towards the southern end of a long hummock (GR 598981) that runs parallel with the Elder Range, a kilometre further west. The trace of an old four-wheel-drive track cuts over another creek-bed. Follow the track, keeping the unmistakable double saddle of the northern ridge of the Elders directly ahead. The track drops into a washaway (GR 595979) and climbs to an old cattle fence that skirts the eastern foot of the range. Eight hundred metres north-west a gap opens in the foothills (GR 590983), easily recognisable by the radial lines of animal tracks converging there. From the gap you get the first view of the Moralana valley and the western ramparts of Wilpena Pound.




Immediately west is a catchment filled with gums and pines and surrounded by steep slopes covered in spinifex. Ascend the left arm of the creek, which rises in a cascade of boulders that have tumbled from the mountainside above. On the left is a rising series of rocky outcrops topped by flat ledges just wide enough to pitch a tent. At around 200 metres above the valley floor, getting here is a tough climb with a pack full of food and water, but the ledges offer panoramic settings for a camp.

Day two

Leave the bulk of your gear at the campsite and carry a day pack with supplies for an eight-hour round trip to the summit. Strike south-west across the face of the hillside, holding your elevation. The ground here is covered with spinifex so if you have gaiters, wear them. The going is steeper but more pleasant once you gain a rocky, pine-clad area at GR 584576. Prop your pack against one of the gnarled trees and enjoy some precious shade, taking in the expanding view to the north and east. Immediately below, the long, narrow valley enclosed by the adjacent Red Range opens out into a wide plain where Beatrice and Moralana Creeks join, draining the faces of two great mountain systems of the Flinders region—the Elder Range at your back and the south face of Wilpena Pound extending before you. The drama of this country lies not in its altitude (at little more than 1000 metres) but in the abrupt rise of the ranges from the vast surrounding plains. From here, zigzag upwards to the south saddle of the ridge (GR 583973), where panoramic views look out toward the distant salt crust of Lake Torrens—a white line spanning 30 degrees of the horizon.

The ridge, the crest of the old sedimentary strata sheared away from an ancient bed, drops sheer for several hundred metres on its eastern face. The opposite slopes are relatively gentle, descending in long folds to the plains. Following the ridgeline is a lot easier than negotiating the gum and acacia scrub on the western side—not only is the view inspiring, but in hot weather you will benefit from cooling breezes. Keep an eye open for a trio of wedge-tailed eagles that regularly ride the thermals overhead. Euros and yellow-footed rock wallabies can also be spotted on the surrounding hillsides.

Head south-south-east along the ridge, dropping and climbing over a series of minor saddles, each scored by a deep ravine that looks like a giant knife cut in the mountain wall. Pockets of tangled scrub will slow your progress, and each rise ahead looks tantalisingly like your goal. The summit cairn is perched on the cliff-edge at GR 594955, complete with a visitors' book in an aluminium box. Roughly 100 people have signed it since 1985, a statistic that says something about your achievement in getting here.

Reverse your route along the ridge to the saddle and your camp. The climb and descent on day two takes five to seven hours. You could pack up and push on down on the same day, but a better option is to take the time to enjoy the warm glow of the late afternoon sun on Wilpena Pound and spend another night under the clear outdoor skies. 

Robert Lamp is a writer and photographer based in Adelaide. He loves wild and solitary places, and has walked extensively in southern Australia, the Himalayas and South-east Asia.

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Endangered species: has the Victorian Government given up?

John Sampson reports on Victoria's latest Climate Change Green Paper



Once common throughout the lowland woodlands and open forests of south-eastern Australia, the grey-crowned babbler—a fun and sociable bird—is now threatened in Victoria. However, habitat restoration projects in Benalla, near Violet Town and Barmah are proving successful in bringing this species back from the brink of extinction. *Dean Ingwersen*

Conservation groups fear the Victorian Government is trying to water down key legislation protecting some of the State's most endangered species. The recently released Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change Green Paper, supposedly aimed at tackling Victoria's growing biodiversity crisis, admits that current policies to save threatened species are not working, yet fails to come up with concrete solutions. Instead it flags a watering down of legislation such as the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, the key goal of which is to guarantee that all Victoria's flora and fauna can survive, flourish and retain their potential for 'evolutionary development in the wild'.

A disturbing excerpt from the Green Paper says: 'Given the magnitude of the likely impacts of climate change, while this goal is laudable, it is probably beyond our management capacity and could be revised to a more realistic objective.' It seems an entirely cynical attitude on the one hand to talk up endangered species, as the Victorian Government did when it used the red-tailed black cockatoo to promote the Commonwealth Games, and on the other to consider removing legislative protection for threatened species without looking into why it has failed

or how much money is required to successfully protect these plants and animals from extinction.

The Victoria Naturally Alliance, which is led by the Victorian National Parks Association and includes the Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation and Greening Australia (Vic), has long called for tougher action in dealing with the state's growing biodiversity crisis. The alliance, which also includes Environment Victoria, the Invasive Species Council, Trust for Nature and Bush Heritage Australia, fears the government is fast running out of time to save many of the state's plants and animals threatened with extinction.

A National Land and Water Resources Audit shows that Victoria is the most environmentally damaged state in Australia. According to CSIRO figures nearly a third of the state's native animals and close to half its native plants are threatened with extinction, a disturbingly high number. Already under pressure from habitat fragmentation, weeds and feral animals, Victoria's natural environment now has a new bogeyman to deal with—climate change. Of the 90 animal species in Australia already identified as at risk from this new threat, more than a third are found in Victoria. These include the

State's faunal emblem, the Leadbeaters possum, as well as the spotted tree frog, mountain pygmy-possum, mallee emu wren and helmeted honeyeater. These studies are far from comprehensive—the actual number is likely to be much greater. The Victoria Naturally Alliance wants the State Government to set clear targets for threatened species by protecting existing native bush and planting large-scale wildlife corridors to help species to cope with the damaging onset of climate change. It believes there needs to be at least a tenfold increase in funding levels to protect and restore habitat and ensure the survival of the State's threatened wildlife.

Act now

The Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change Green Paper is open for public comment until 30 June. The Victoria Naturally Alliance has set up an online submission form. Go to www.victorianaturally.org.au and tell the Victorian Government that you want to see it come up with resources and plans to turn around the State's biodiversity crisis.

Firebreaks or breaks for the logging industry?



Sarah Rees examines the recent practice of logging massive firebreaks in Victoria's national parks

Across Victoria's forests land clearing, under the guise of creating firebreaks, is taking place in remote and wild areas; the justification for this is fire prevention but the jury is still out on its merit or even its legality. In 2007 the Great Divide fires razed 1.1 million hectares of forest. During the fires there was a lot of pressure on the government to 'act' on the firestorm sweeping Victoria. Water was being moved in great quantities between storage reservoirs and as fire fronts neared Melbourne's drinking water, in a fit of panic foresters ordered that firebreaks be cut across the catchments and national parks. The breaks were carved across the Divide, every ridge line accessible was logged and cleared. The endangered Leadbeaters possum, of which there are as few as 2000 remaining, was subject to intensive habitat destruction. Rainforests were dozed to the ground and 300-year-old trees were felled and carted for woodchips. The firebreaks moved through the forests like seismic activity bereft of strong science but determined by the need for 'action' and to supply wood to a logging industry locked out of its forests for fire safety. After 250 kilometres of linear logging coupes crisscrossed the land like an urban road system, the clearing was halted as the firebreaks were deemed illegal. The State Government had failed to comply with the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). The Act prevents the destruction of endangered species habitat, not under fire suppression, but under fire prevention. The State had continued to log the breaks outside of fire danger. An investigation by the Federal Government determined that parts of the firebreaks were unlawful and any further cutting of firebreaks must be undertaken with EPBC

approval. The Victorian Government was ordered to explain how they would manage high conservation values in these forests and, more importantly, how they would offset the damage. Scientific reports have since established that around 5000 hectares of old-growth forest need to be added to the national park system with a further 60 000 old trees needing to be replaced to restore habitat. Further national park additions are expected but, despite policy commitments, no forest has been added to the reserve system and any formal prosecution against the State has been avoided. Predictably the only windfall gains have been for the woodchippers who bought the logs at fire-sale prices of 50 per cent off the normal undervalued price.

Act now

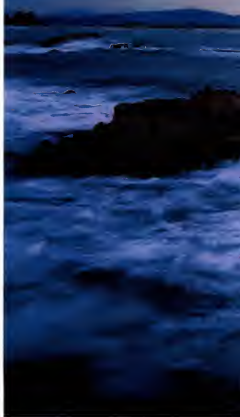
Write to Premier John Brumby (john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au), Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings (gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au), and your local MP. New firebreaks are going to be cut across Victoria's remaining woodlands and forests, so do your bit to keep the government honest.

- First, ask whether the \$500 million the government is spending on these breaks could be better spent on training early strike teams, greater funding for the CFA and purchasing new 'Elvis' helicopters; scientific consensus is that an 'early strike' is safer and will keep our wilderness intact.
- Secondly, ask where the government's publicly promised conservation offsets are? These offsets would have Melbourne's water catchments, currently open to logging, added to national parks and protected for future generations.

Bastion Point

Megan Clinton outlines the latest

The controversial Bastion Point development, proposed on the windswept wilderness coast of Mallacoota, will finally undergo public scrutiny at a Panel Inquiry Hearing to commence on 14 July 2008. The proposal seeks to develop a boat ramp, jetty and car park that would require the blasting of 40 metres of unique reef, the destruction of significant stands of native vegetation and the permanent loss of habitat for native animals. At the Directions Hearing held on 20 February 2008 the East Gippsland Shire continued to deliberate on whether it even wanted to be the proponent of this destructive white elephant. The Shire also sought to confirm support for the project from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) as well as the withdrawal of the DSE's submission highlighting concerns about reduced surfer days, safety and the removal of significant stands of native vegetation. The Shire said that if the submission was not withdrawn, it would request that the DSE propose an alternative option to the present



developments

boat-ramp development. The DSE rightly pointed out that it was not the proponent and was therefore not responsible for the development options of the Shire, but rather for highlighting concerns it had regarding the development. At the last meeting held at the end of March, the DSE refused to withdraw its submission; despite this the Shire decided it would proceed. Environment groups are positive about the decision from the panel to begin the Panel Inquiry as this will provide DSE, local residents and environment groups with the opportunity to highlight the numerous and significant adverse impacts associated with the proposal on both the environment and the community.

Act now

Donations are now being sought to help finance the next critical stage of the Inquiry. To donate or help in other critical ways, such as letter writing, please go to www.savebastionpoint.org

Sunrise at Bastion Point, Gary Proctor



The Murray: wounded at **both** ends



Feral horses are not only devastating Kosciuszko National Park, but also Victoria's High Country, Phil Ingamells reports

Feral horse numbers are on the increase in Victoria's Alpine National Park, and little is being done to stem the damage they cause. They are particularly rampant in areas close to the NSW border, around Limestone Creek and the Cobberas. Parks Victoria missed a great opportunity to control feral horse populations effectively when their numbers were greatly reduced after the 2003 fires. Their eradication program has concentrated on a comparatively small horse population on the Bogong High Plains, leaving the bulk of the park's population relatively free to breed. The Victorian Government removed licensed cattle grazing from the park in 1975, largely to avoid damage to peat beds and wetlands at the headwaters to many Victorian rivers. But horse damage to many of these areas in the Alpine National Park is now greater than the damage from cattle grazing, and the impact of feral pigs is also on the increase. We face a situation where the Murray River is being trashed at its source, as well as drained of water throughout its path to the sea. With alpine ecosystems highly at risk from climate change, the least we can do is to protect them as much as possible. That means doing whatever we can to remove threats from pest plants and animals, wherever that is feasible.



A wetland in the Alpine National Park before feral horse damage. **Top**, the same spot after feral horses have trampled it. Phil Ingamells

Act now

Send a message to Victoria's Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings (gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au), and ask him to act decisively on hard-hoofed animals throughout the Alpine National Park, and all other threats likely to reduce the resilience of the park to climate change impacts.

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Fires, dynamite and climate change

Vica Bayley reports on the latest from Tasmania

The important role that forests play in the global fight against climate change is becoming clearer as more research is done by the scientific community. As great clouds of smoke from annual forestry burns blanket Tasmania, the public has been outraged by the visual demonstration of the massive amounts of carbon released into the atmosphere each year by the logging industry. Forests are like giant pumps, drawing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in branches, trunks, roots and soil, building up huge stores of carbon over centuries of growing. Logging releases much of this carbon, contributing to climate change and undermining Australia's efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and demonstrate real global leadership on this critical issue. Protecting forests is one of the quickest and cheapest ways to combat climate change.

Tasmanian woodchipping giant Gunns and its banker, the ANZ, continue to pose a threat to Tasmania's future through ongoing logging of carbon-rich forests across the state. In addition to driving climate change, this logging threatens endangered species, degrades domestic water catchments and costs taxpayers millions of dollars in annual subsidies.

The Tamar Valley pulp mill remains a dark cloud looming over Tasmanian families with the climate change impacts being one of the most important aspects of the project which hasn't been assessed. Logging of native forests to feed the mill is expected to emit massive amounts of greenhouse gases, the equivalent of putting an extra 2.3 million cars on the road each year.

The ANZ is considering financing this mill, an action that would contravene its commit-

ment to social and environmental responsibility and seriously let down the public. Using your money to finance an environmentally and socially destructive pulp mill is a major failure in this regard.

Aware of the bank's obligations, the public has been mobilising around the country, holding rallies and protest events outside ANZ branches and booking appointments with branch managers. Everybody can assist the campaign to stop Gunns pulp mill by engaging with their ANZ branch and letting the manager know their feelings about the ANZ bankrolling a chemical pulp mill, heavily dependent on logging native forest and approved by shonky, fast-tracked government assessments.

While the pulp mill campaign highlights the potential funding role of the ANZ, the logging activities the bank supports through its client Gunns continue in world-class forests across Tasmania. World Heritage-value forests like those in the Styx, Upper Florentine and Weld valleys are being lost to clear-felling and burning operations with resulting impacts on wildlife, climate change and wilderness values.

In March a high-level international delegation was sent by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee to investigate the logging of forests outside the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (WHA) and the impact this is having on values that should be protected. While visiting the Upper Florentine with conservationists, the delegation heard an explosion on an adjacent ridge and subsequently learned that it was caused by logging contractors dynamiting a giant tree. Forestry Tasmania regularly blows up old growth trees as part of logging operations despite the risk of fire. The explosion near the Upper Florentine did indeed ignite a fire that got out of control and burnt to within a few hundred metres of



the WHA. This gave the visiting delegation a first-hand example of the real and serious threat logging operations pose to the proper protection of values within the WHA.

Fire also featured as a serious threat to the Tarkine rainforest when an irresponsible four-wheel-drive owner left the controversial 'road to nowhere' and got lost. After deliberately lighting a fire to attract attention, the driver found his way out, but left a fire that ultimately went on to burn well over 16 000 hectares of wilderness. Part of the original argument against the construction of the road to nowhere (or any road into a pristine, wilderness area) is the increased fire risk of providing increased human access. On top of fires, roads provide access points for disease, weeds, feral pests, poachers and renegade visitors to degrade the area and impact on unique values.

The conservation movement supports proper protection of Tasmania's unique wild areas but the threats posed by logging operations and new roads are great. More needs to be done to properly fund the protection and management of these wild areas that make Tasmania a unique place in the world.

Apocalypse 2008: A coupe of wild forest in central Tasmania has been clear-felled and then firebombed from a helicopter. Bob Brown. **Inset:** protesters opposed to the Gunns pulp mill outside the ANZ bank in Martin Place, Sydney. Vica Bayley



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Wielangta and the EPBC Act



Forest in the region of the threatened Wielangta Hill. Kip Nunn

Helen Gee gives us the latest update on Bob Brown and the Wielangta case

It is now more than three years since the Wielangta case first went to trial. As we face a global wave of extinction, there is intense questioning of the legality of native-forest logging in Tasmania—and, by inference, across the nation. This comes in the wake of a landmark judgment handed down in the Federal Court in December 2006. Readers will recall the momentous court finding that forestry operations in the Wielangta area, in South-eastern Tasmania, are likely to have a significant impact on three threatened species—the Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle, the Wielangta stag beetle and the swift parrot. Furthermore, forestry operations had been carried out otherwise than in accordance with the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). Finally, the Commonwealth had failed to carry out its responsibilities under the RFA for preparing threatened species Recovery Plans and proper five-year RFA reviews, ignoring widespread criticisms of forest practices in Tasmania. Incredibly, Forestry Tasmania's appeal to the full bench of the Federal Court was upheld last November. Unfortunately for our threatened wildlife, it was established that once a 20-year RFA was signed by State and Federal Governments, the impact of logging could continue if both signatories agreed to allow it. It's a case of the law intends to protect endangered wildlife but if Canberra and Hobart ignore logging which endangers their existence, they can't, Senator Brown said. Under federal law (the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act clause 102), Minister for the Environment, Mr Garrett has the power to intervene to prevent the logging of old-growth and rainforest. So far he has failed to do so.

What is on trial now is the effectiveness of the EPBC Act. Does our Federal Government intend to stand by and accept that there is nothing the responsible minister (Peter Garrett) can do to prevent the impact of logging because the EPBC Act 'does not apply'? Senator Bob Brown now has an application before the High Court to appeal the Federal Court's decision. If leave is granted, Senator Brown's appeal will be heard in the High Court in the following months. The EPBC Act will be under the rigorous scrutiny Australians should demand. This is a matter of huge public importance with far-reaching implications for Australia's natural environment. Of broader significance is the carbon and climate issue. Regional Forest Agreements do not yet recognise the climate-saving contribution of old-growth forests through the massive amount of carbon they store, above and below the ground. New plantations are no substitute. A big test of Professor Garnaut's climate crisis review is whether he recognises and addresses total emissions and, indeed, the Tasmanian contribution specifically. Premier Lennon has invited him to do so and we need to ensure that he does because of the global significance of Tasmania's forests.

Act now

Please support Senator Bob Brown in his stand for our wildlife. This court process has been made possible by, and relies on, public generosity. Lobbying and letter writing for the forests is also important. You can let the Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, know what you think (peter.garrett@aph.gov.au). Bob's legal arguments are on the web site www.on-trial.info; you can also make a donation here.

Woodchips

The Great Melt: glacier retreat accelerates

The UN Environmental Program (UNEP) reports that in the years 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 the average rate of thinning and melting of glaciers more than doubled—raising new worries about the speed of climate change. The head of UNEP, Achim Steiner, was quoted as saying: 'There are many canaries emerging in the climate change coalmine. The glaciers are perhaps among those making the most noise.' On another front, Nicholas Stern has said that he underestimated the threat from global warming in his major report published in 2006. Stern says that the latest climate science shows that global emissions were rising faster and upsetting the climate at a greater rate than previously thought. In his 2006 report, he compared the economic risk of global warming to that of the Great Depression in the 1930s. More recently he has said: 'People who said I was scaremongering were profoundly wrong.' Given the increasingly fast retreat of the world's glaciers, it appears that he is right.

Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary: mining suspended (for the moment)

Mining company Marathon Resources has had its mineral exploitation licence suspended pending the finalisation of investigations into illegal dumping and vandalism by the company in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary (see *Wild* no 108). Following reports of the breaches, South Australian Greens MLC Mark Parnell introduced a Bill to parliament to ban mining and exploration in all South Australian nature sanctuaries, only to have it voted down by both the Labor Government and the Liberal Opposition. The sanctuaries constitute less than one-tenth of one per cent of the state; however, Arkaroola in particular is thought to contain massive reserves of uranium and, of course, profits.

River Red Gums on the Murray: more calls for protection

A World Wide Fund For Nature report has called for the Barmah Forest and other river red gum forests in northern Victoria to be given high priority for protection. The report said that the most important bio-regions were those with low levels of reservation and high levels of threat to native flora and fauna, and that in 'the Victorian riverina the long history of alienation for grazing and cropping means that few intact sites remain to include in protected areas'. This follows on from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) draft report of last year, which recommended increasing protected areas from 23 per cent to 65 per cent. VEAC recommended the creation of five national parks, severe reductions in sustainable timber harvesting and large environmental water allocations.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email editorial@wild.com.au.

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Rain games

Mathew Farrell surveys the latest waterproof bushwalking jackets

Wild Gear Surveys: what they are and what they're not

The purpose of Wild Gear Surveys is to assist readers in purchasing specialist outdoors equipment of the quality and with the features most appropriate for their needs, and to save them time and money in the process.

The cost of 'objective' and meaningful testing is beyond the means not only of Wild, but of the Australian outdoors industry in general, and we are not aware of such testing being regularly carried out by an outdoors magazine anywhere in the world. Similarly, given the number of products involved, field testing is beyond the means of Australia's outdoors industry. Wild Gear Surveys summarise information, collate and present it in a convenient and readily comparable form, with guidelines and advice to assist in the process of wise equipment selection.

Surveyors are selected for their knowledge of the subject and their impartiality. Surveys are checked and verified by an independent referee, and reviewed by Wild's editorial staff. Surveys are based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of the relevant issue's production; ranges and specifications may change later. Before publication each manufacturer/distributor is sent a summary of the surveyor's findings regarding the specifications of their products for verification.

Some aspects of surveys, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgement on the part of the surveyor, the referee and Wild, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily upon price relative to features and quality. A product with more elaborate or specialised features may be rated more highly by someone whose main concern is not price.

An important criterion for inclusion is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of the major Australian cities. With the recent proliferation of brands and models, and the constant ebb and flow of their availability, 'wide availability' is becoming an increasingly difficult concept to pin down.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch



Kim Tyson lived in her jacket for a week in the Western Arthurs, warding off wind, rain and pandani alike. Mathew Farrell

UNLIKE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD with more predictable weather, precipitation is something we have to prepare for when heading out in our great land. Chill winds and rain not only upset our comfort, but the temperature shift can cause dramatic changes in our energy, metabolism and general wellbeing. To be hit by a

to wear shorts (with thermal tights if needed) and a long jacket—probably because of our warmer climate. This combination is much less common in other, colder parts of the world, where overpants and waist-length jackets are favoured. A bewildering selection of wet weather gear is available commercially. This survey has

Waterproof jackets for bushwalking

	Fabric	Zip and closures	Jacket features	Comments	Approx price, \$
Arc'teryx Canada www.seatosummit.com.au/brands.php					
Theta AR	Gore-Tex Pro Shell	One-way water-resistant main and pit zips	Fleece chin; Velcro and elastic cuffs; two high waist pockets, one chest pocket and an internal zip pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; close-fitted cut; helmet-sized hood; one-handed waist and hem drawcords; upper thigh-length	900
Alpha SL	Gore-Tex PacLite 2L	As above	Fleece chin; Velcro cuffs; two high waist water-resistant pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; close-fitted cut; helmet-sized hood; one-handed hem drawcord, waist-length	940
Berghaus China www.berghaus.com					
RGi	Aquafoil	One-way zip with double storm-flap	Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; two handwarmer pockets	Women's model is called the Calisto; hem drawcord; mesh lining; waist-length	130
Boralis	Aquafoil Light 2.5L	As above	Elastic cuffs; zip-away hood; two venting map pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; close-fitted cut; hem drawcord; reflective trim on sleeves, waist-length	230
PacLite Trek	Gore-Tex Pro Shell	As above	Elastic cuffs; zip-away hood; two venting water-resistant map pockets and sleeve pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; close-fitted cut; elasticised waist and hem drawcords; mid-thigh-length	480
BlackWolf China www.blackwolf.com.au					
Icarus	Gore-Tex PacLite 2L	Single press-stud storm-flap	Velcro and elastic cuffs; high waist pockets	Women's model is called the Artemis; waist-length	200
Ventura	Gore-Tex	Double press-stud storm-flap	Velcro and elastic cuffs; two handwarmer and two chest pockets	Women's model is called the Amazon; mid-thigh-length	350
Kathmandu China www.kathmandu.com.au					
Virga	NGX	Double storm-flap	Fleece chin; Velcro and elastic cuffs; two waist pockets and one internal mesh pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit, hem and waist drawcords; mid-thigh-length	450
Beaufort V2	Gore-Tex	Single storm-flap	Fleece collar and chin; Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood, two handwarmer pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; low volume non-wired zip-off hood; hem and waist drawcords; upper thigh-length	460
Stormfront Jacket V3	Gore-Tex	Double storm-flap and water-resistant pit zips	Fleece chin; Velcro and elastic cuffs; two waist pockets, two large water-resistant chest pockets, one internal mesh pocket and one neoprene radio pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; hem and waist drawcords; upper thigh-length	560
Low Alpine China www.lowalpine.com					
Enduro Jacket	Tripoint 2L	Single storm-flap	Velcro cuffs; zip-away hood; two handwarmer pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; one-handed hem drawcord; waist-length	200
Fusion GTX	Gore-Tex Pro Shell	Double storm-flap, vents on back of sleeves	Fleece chin; Velcro cuffs; two high waist pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; glove attachment points on sleeves; waist-length	350
Peak	Tripoint 2.5L	As above	Velcro cuffs; zip-away hood; two high water-resistant waist pockets and one internal pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; one-handed hem drawcord; waist-length	600
Marmot Bangladesh/China/China www.marmot.com					
Precip	PreCip	Double storm-flap and pit zips	Fleece chin; Velcro and elastic cuffs; stow-away hood; two high waist pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; very lightweight; waist-length	200
Minimalist	Gore-Tex PacLite 2L	Single storm-flap and pit zips	Fleece chin; Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; fleece-lined handwarmer pockets and water-resistant chest pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit, upper thigh-length	500
Stormlight	Gore-Tex XCR and PacLite	As above	Fleece chin; Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; high water-resistant waist pockets and internal mesh pocket	Men's fit; XCR fabric in high-wear areas; hem drawcord, upper thigh-length	800

Australian outdoor equipment retailers. No distinction has been applied with regard to price. While the general adage 'you get what you pay for' is certainly true, it should be noted that many of these jackets are priced to reflect materials and design features that may or may not be of benefit to you. Look further than the price tag when choosing an appropriate jacket.

I recently sold a walking jacket to a woman to replace her 20-year-old model. Whether you get such a good run out of yours or not, it's to be hoped that you will wear it for many years. While I wouldn't encourage you to buy an otherwise inferior jacket, it helps if you like the colour. Beyond aesthetics, visibility is worth considering. Red, yellow and orange jackets are more easily spotted. Reflective piping is a good idea for the same reasons.

Fabrics

These days, there are many waterproof/breathable membrane fabrics available. WL Gore created the first commercial waterproof/breathable mem-

brane line-up of products. Test data are given by many manufacturers about their own versus competitors' fabrics. Take these with a grain of salt, and don't just buy into the most boastful marketing campaign. Whichever membrane is used, the laminating system works the same way. In a two-layer (2L) fabric, the membrane is laminated to the inside of a nylon face fabric (usually ripstop). A 2L fabric is light, but the exposed membrane is susceptible to becoming clogged with dirt/sweat or being damaged. A degree of protection is usually provided by a separate liner of mesh or nylon sheet. In a three-layer (3L) fabric, in addition to the face fabric, a protective layer is bonded to the inside of the membrane. Three-layer fabrics are more robust and expensive than 2L fabrics. They are slightly heavier and less breathable also. Nei-

jackets use an interesting hybrid of these two fabric types (referred to as 2.5L): 3L fabric is used in high-wear areas (the shoulders, lumbar and portions of the sleeves), and the lighter 2L everywhere else. Many garments feature a tougher face fabric in high-wear areas. As bushwalking is rugged without being exceptionally aerobic (compared with such activities

as running, cycling or paddling), most of the jackets reviewed here are constructed with waterproof/breathable membranes bonded in a 3L construction. A few of the reviewed jackets are 2.5L and 2L. No serious jackets are constructed with non-breathable fabrics any longer. While it shouldn't really affect your choice of membrane, it's worth noting that membranes do not breathe as well in low temperatures or high humidity. Without providing physics



Waterproof jackets for bushwalking continued

	Fabric	Zip and closures	Jacket features	Comments	Approx. price, \$
Mont China www.mont.com.au					
Austral	Hydranaut	Double storm-flap	Velcro cuffs; two waist pockets and one map pocket	Women's model is called the Sierra; one-handed waist drawcord; knee-length	300
Tempest	Hydranaut Pro	Two-way main zip with double press-stud storm-flap	Velcro cuffs; two waist pockets, two handwarmer pockets and one small water-resistant chest pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; one-handed waist drawcord; knee-length	430
Mountain Designs China www.mountaindesigns.com.au					
Photon †	Repel Storm 2.5L	Double storm-flap and pit zips	Velcro and elastic cuffs; zip-away hood; two high waist pockets and one water-resistant chest pocket	Women's model is called the Helion; hem and waist drawcords; upper-thigh-length	240
Metaleuca	Repel Storm	Double storm-flap	Fleece chin, Velcro cuffs; zip-away hood; two handwarmer pockets, two water-resistant chest pockets and one internal mesh pocket	Women's model is called the Acacia; hem and waist drawcords; mid-thigh-length	300
Stratus	Gore-Tex XCR	Double storm-flap and water-resistant pit zips	Fleece chin and collar, Velcro cuffs; zip-away hood; two handwarmer pockets, one water-resistant chest pocket and one internal mesh pocket	Women's model is called the Strato; reflective piping on back of sleeves; hem and waist drawcords; mid-thigh-length	600
Mountain Hardwear China www.mountainhardwear.com					
Epic	Conduit Silk	Water-resistant main zip with single storm-flap and water-resistant pit zips	Fleece chin, Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; venting waist pockets and one water-resistant chest pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; one-handed hood drawcord; hem drawcord; upper-thigh-length	210
Typhoon	Gore-Tex PacLite 2L	Double storm-flap and water-resistant pit zips	Fleece chin, Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; venting waist pockets and one chest pocket	Comes in men's and women's fit; one-handed hood drawcord; hem drawcord; waist-length	400
Beryllium	Gore-Tex Pro Shell	As above	Fleece chin, Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; two water-resistant chest pockets	Men's fit; one-handed hood drawcord; hem drawcord; waist-length	580
Outdoor Research China www.outdoorresearch.com					
Revel	Pertex Shield 2.5L	Single storm-flap and water-resistant pit zips which extend to hem	Fleece collar and chin; Velcro and elastic cuffs; zip-away hood; internal chest pocket and two zippered hand pockets	Women's model is called the Reflexa; waist-length	300
Elixir	Gore-Tex PacLite 2L	Single storm-flap and water-resistant pit zips	Velcro and elastic cuffs; zip-away hood; two handwarmer pockets, one chest and one internal pocket	Men's fit; hem drawcord; waist-length	430
Furio	Gore-Tex PacLite and Pro Shell	Water-resistant main zip and pit zips which extend to hem	Velcro and elastic cuffs; stow-away hood; two handwarmer pockets, two chest pockets and two internal pockets	Men's fit; Pro Shell fabric in high-wear areas; hem drawcord; waist-length	550
Pallin China www.paddypallin.com					
Composite †	Gore-Tex XCR and Gore-Tex PacLite	Double storm-flap and pit zips	Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood	Women's fit; Gore-Tex XCR used on high-wear areas; waist-length	400
Cz Jacket †	Gore-Tex Pro Shell and Gore-Tex PacLite	Double storm-flap and pit zips	Fleece collar and chin; Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; two high waist pockets and internal chest pockets	Comes in men's and women's fit; one-handed hem drawcord; Gore-Tex Pro Shell used on high-wear areas; upper-thigh-length	450
Vista	Gore-Tex XCR	Single storm-flap	Velcro cuffs; two handwarmer pockets, two water-resistant chest pockets and two internal mesh pockets	Men's fit; waist drawcord; knee-length	550
Snowgum China www.snowgum.com.au					
Osmoses	Gore-Tex	Single press-stud storm-flap	Fleece collar and chin; Velcro cuffs; stow-away hood; two handwarmer pockets, two waist pockets and one water-resistant chest pocket	Women's model is called the Electra; waist drawcord; upper-thigh-length	400
Fabric features: 2L, two-layer, 2.5L, two-and-a-half-layer, 3L, three-layer. Zip and closures: jackets have two-way zips and Velcro storm-flaps unless specified otherwise. Features: all jackets feature a hood, fleece chin means that the chin area is lined with fleece. † not seen by surveyor. ‡ not seen by referee. The country listed after the manufacturer/brand name is the country in which the products are made.					

Buy right

■ **Intended use.** The main thing to determine is what you intend to use the jacket for. If it is overnight walking solely, then a longer, 3L jacket with a large hood and handwarmer pockets would probably be your best bet. Unless you intend to wear overpants, it is useful that the jacket cover your shorts. If rock and alpine climbing are thrown into the bargain, a shorter jacket, a large hood and pockets that are clear of a harness and lighter materials (for pack-away size), are important considerations.

Consider whether things like pit zips and more breathable materials are valuable to you or not. If you're unlikely to be doing highly aerobic activities, or you know you don't sweat as much as some, fewer features and heavier-weight fabric will put up with more abuse and last longer.

■ **Fit.** Do not trust the sizing guides on Internet web sites—always try jackets on for fit. If you do intend to wear layers underneath (such as

a fleece top), make sure they fit well. Be realistic about this—will you really be hiking with your thickest fleece underneath your jacket? Generally speaking, the closer the fit, the better a jacket will feel and work. Ensure that the sleeves aren't too short, especially when reaching over your head. Figure out if you can pull the sleeves up easily. This won't be a consideration for everyone, but is handy when you get hot. The collar shouldn't be too tight when zipped up, nor should the hood. Trial fit a jacket with a pack on too, as this will limit a jacket's motion. Waist-belts and shoulder straps have a helpful way of showing up any potential problems with a jacket.



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is reached at certain combinations of pressure,

temperature and humidity (in a real-world sense, low temperature or high humidity). This means that water vapour inside the jacket will condense. There's not a lot you can do about it. If this occurs and causes you discomfort, you should ask yourself: 'Do I really need a waterproof jacket on right now?'

Design

A good bushwalking jacket, as outlined above, is long enough to cover your shorts or at least the waist of your overpants. If it is long enough, you can sit on the tail of the jacket, keeping your bum dry and a touch warmer. It is beyond the scope of this review to indicate the sleeve length and volume of the various jackets, but it



The Pallin C2 Jacket features a combination of fabrics to enhance durability while keeping the jacket lightweight.

is worth checking that sleeves are long and broad enough to cover the bulk of your hand when walking. Sufficiently long sleeves won't ride up when raising your arms above your head. Cuffs should have Velcro and/or elastic. Broad sleeves can be rolled up easily. A drawcord at your waist helps to shape and fit the jacket. 'One hand' toggles are just that—they only require one hand to adjust. Some toggles are on the front of the jacket, some are hidden inside pockets or even on the inside of the jacket. Ensure that your pack straps don't interfere with drawcord toggles. It's most uncon-

or chin guard is a godsend for keeping your neck

and chin comfortable with the main zip fully done up. If the jacket zips up tightly around your throat, the zip or fabric can chafe. This is less important on jackets with a deep, roomy collar and hood (such as the Mont Tempest). It is likely to be an issue if you choose to zip away your hood, as this restricts the collar room.

Zips

A two-way main zip allows you to unzip it from the bottom. While not imperative, this is a handy feature for toilet duties, accessing a climbing harness, and sitting down more comfortably. A good storm-flap closes with either Velcro or press studs and keeps water out of the main zip. Velcro is generally easier, lighter and more comfortable than studs, but can become hard to use when choked with ice or mud. This only tends to be a problem in very harsh conditions with well-worn Velcro. The alternative is a water-resistant main zip. These are still not very common on waterproof jackets. Pit zips are worth considering if you like to move fast or spend time in hot, wet areas, as no waterproof/breathable fabrics are quite breathable enough for high-output activities. Zips under

the armpits can be opened to allow a release of

steam and the ingress of cool air. Pit zips add a small degree of weight, bulk and complexity (thus cost) to a jacket. Water-resistant pit zips are a good idea, but far from mandatory, since rain is unlikely to find its way up into your armpits.

Pockets

Handwarmer pockets are great! Having separate pockets with good closures helps to avoid losing things out of your chosen handwarmer pockets. Big chest pockets will reduce the breathability of a jacket (especially when loaded with maps and such), as the chest is one of the biggest heat-exchange areas on your torso, though such pockets are very handy for stowing maps and other things. Where the jackets reviewed have pockets of particular shapes and sizes, a reference has been given, such as map pockets, compass pockets, radio pockets (2-way hand-held UHF radio). With regard to weather protection, top-entry pockets with a Velcro flap, water-resistant zips with a 'zip garage' at the top or labyrinth seals (storm-flaps) perform best. Water-resistant zips are slightly compromised without zip garages, and regular zips give still less protection. Internal pockets are better for waterproofing, but may be compromised by sweat-vapour.

Care and consideration

All the featured fabrics work, and can be cared for and treated in much the same way. When they become abraded or dirty on the outside, the face fabric will no longer bead water. Within the industry this is called 'wetting out'. Wetting out does not affect a jacket's waterproof properties (unless the membrane itself is torn), but a saturated face fabric cannot breathe. Washing the jacket and retreating it with a Durable Water Repellent (DWR) restoring agent will revive the face fabric, beading water off and allowing it to breathe properly again. DWR treatments are activated by low heat. Tumble-drying and then ironing (on low heat) a garment will bond the DWR agent to the face fabric and activate it. While completely safe for your jacket, it is a daunting thing to take an iron to it for the first time! Similarly, sweat and dirt on the inside of the jacket can clog the inner fabric or membrane; washing helps to relieve this. ☹

Other brands available

Brand	Distributor	Contact

Name game

Breathability. A measure of how quickly vapour can pass through a fabric. A 'more breathable' (relative) fabric will transport more vapour in a given time frame. When a fabric is not sufficiently breathable, you will perspire at a quicker rate than it can pass through the fabric. Thus, moisture will build up inside the jacket causing you to become wet.

Zip garage. A little awning or garage that covers the zip-pull. Zip garages help to prevent water from entering the portion at the top of a zip that cannot be closed properly.

Two-way zip. There are two zip-pulls on the one length of zip. This allows the zip to be opened from the bottom and the top.

Storm-flap. One or two pieces of fabric that close over a zip to help seal out foul weather. A double storm-flap has a piece of material on either side of the main zip. They fold over each other and are then held closed with velcro or press studs. They offer greater protection, but are heavier, more cumbersome and more expensive to produce than single flaps. Lately, trends have been heading towards lighter, simpler designs. Thus, most jackets these days sport single storm-flaps. While they are technically inferior, I have person-



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Touch Screen



Inbuilt voice recorder
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LED Torch

TOUCH SCREEN

Little black box of tricks

The GPS that does it all

Magellan's latest hand-held GPS range, the **Triton 2000** and **1500**, show that trends in urban electronics are filtering into outdoor equipment. Containing a voice recorder, LED lamp, a large touch-screen, a camera and more (only the 2000 has the camera), the Triton units bundle together almost all the electronic gadgetry one could conceivably take out into the bush. SD memory cards are a convenient way to upload maps, store photos and log data. While fully featured, these units have graduated from the school of hard knocks, and are submersible (as a bonus, they still work afterwards). With all the other goodies to play with, it can be easy to forget that these units contain a GPS. Interactive maps and a touch screen interface mean that navigation is more intuitive than in the past. The 1500 and 2000 retail for \$899 and \$1099 respectively. Contact **Next Destination** on (08) 9444 0233 for more information.



Long-haul truckers with style

Big-pack lovers will appreciate the voluptuous lines of **Osprey's** new large-capacity **rucksacks**, the **Argon** and **Xenon** (men's and women's, respectively). The Argon and Xenon are designed to be both comfortable and lightweight; for example, the 85 litre Xenon only weighs 2.5 kilograms. The Argon is available in 70, 85 and 110 litres sizes, while the Xenon comes in 70 and 85 litres. These packs have loads of nifty features, removable bumbags/lid and daypack/hydration packs, as well as a myriad of pockets. There are many size and fit

The generous curves of the Osprey Xenon. Above, all the Triton 2000 is missing is a phone. Right, The pancake sized X-bowl.



options, along with the heat-moulded waistbelts, ensuring a customised fit. They are priced from \$499.95 to \$549.95 (depending on size) and distributed by **Neovista**, who can be contacted on (02) 8799 2416 for further details.

Thick skinned

For those familiar with **Skins** compression garments, **Fusionsnow** compression thermals are a natural progression providing extra insulation as well as compression. The **Below Zero** thermals contain a blend of merino wool, lycra and carbon to provide thermal insulation and elastic compression. The benefits of merino thermals have been much touted. Compression garments reduce muscle vibration and lactic acid build-up whilst increasing circulation. The net effect is reduced fatigue, greater endurance and quicker muscle recovery—all good things when exercising in the wilderness.

The **Above Zero** (designed for warmer pursuits garments) use polyester microfibre in place of wool, and X-Static silver instead of carbon. The microfibre is essentially a lighter insulator than wool, and the silver performs as an antimicrobial odour protection—a far cry from polypropylene raincoat thermals. RRP is \$180 for the **Below Zero** tops or bottoms, \$169 for the **Above Zero** garments. More information is available from **Fusionsnow** on (02) 9531 2011.

Knick-Knacks

Tough yet accommodating

We're all vying for space in this crowded world, and the contents of our rucksack are no exception. This is where the **X-bowl** comes into its own, telescoping from a fully functioning bowl to something smaller than a frisbee, and weighing only 80 grams. It's no pushover, however; the flexible silicon walls cope with the hottest



curries, and the base will let you chop anything that goes into them. Metric measurements on the inside round off its helpful nature. The **X-Bowl** retails for \$19.95. To find out more, contact **Sea to Summit** on (08) 9221 6617.

The Eagle has landed—in Australia this time

Whether or not the moon landing was crafted in a studio, your camp lighting will look as though it was. While not as good for telling ghost stories

by as your headlamp, the **Black Diamond Apollo** will deliver a cosy uniform glow in your tent. The dimmer switch helps with creating a romantic mood or long exposure photography. For the drink-can sized **Apollo**, four AAA batteries (or a **Black Diamond** rechargeable battery) are required. RRP is \$89.95. Contact **Sea to Summit** to find out more.



Travel with a little flare

Carrying an **EPiRB** in remote areas to alert emergency rescue crews of your location is often wise. However, one serious limitation with many units is their location accuracy. That's where the **Eflare EF300** comes in.

At night, the **EF300** is visible for more than a kilometre. Delivering 120 flashes per minute for up to 40 hours, it may prove as popular with campsite dance parties as emergency rescue crews. Four AA batteries power this pocket-sized strobe. A robust waterproof housing makes it suitable for almost any environment. The 450 gram unit has an RRP of \$29.95. **Netlink** can be contacted on (03) 9525 3366.



The **Apollo** was a small step for **Black Diamond**.

Trix

Take it easy

Upon returning from **Nepal**, **David Holt** passed on the following advice for walking at altitude:

Walk slowly—if you can feel your heart thumping, you are going too fast.

Rest regularly.

Drink lots of water.

We asked whether he could expand on this for us. His reply was as succinct as his original submission: 'That's the beauty of it. It's really that simple.' Well put, David.

Wild welcomes readers' contributions to this section; payment is at our standard rate. Send them to the address at the end of this department.

New and innovative products of relevance to the rucksack sports (on loan to **WdW**) and/or information about them, including high-resolution digital photos (on CD or by email), are welcome for possible review in this department. Written items should be typed, include recommended retail prices and preferably not exceed 200 words. Send them to **Wild**, PO Box 415, Pahrana, Vic 3181 or contact us by email: editorialadmn@wild.com.au

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The Trangia 27-1 from Ruscac Supplies is an ideal compact cooking set for one or two people. Comprising of a pair of one litre saucepans, a fry pan, windshields, pot grips, burner and strap, the 27-1 weighs just 720 grams—

The Exped Airmat 7.5 Pump DLX from Expedition Equipment is ultra light and ultra compact, and as comfortable as a down mat but without the extra insulation. Features include a built in pump/pillow, and double air chambers to safeguard against punctures. RRP \$139



Wilderness Wear Adventure Merino long-sleeve top and long-johns. Made in Australia from 100 per cent Australian Merino.

The Leatherman Skeetool CX from Zen Imports sheds a lot of unnecessary weight. It features a high-quality knife, pliers with wire cutters, multiple bit driver and karabiner-bottle opener in a very light, compact package. RRP \$220





Australians everywhere joined Kevin Rudd in saying sorry to the Stolen Generations—Hilary Ivery on the Overland Track on 13 February 2008. Hilary emailed us, writing: "I knew I was going to be on the Overland Track on Sorry Day, and I wanted to acknowledge it somehow, even if no one saw my sign (except Liz). It felt important to acknowledge what a landmark day it was

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Area 3.9 m² (vestibule 1.3 m²)

DAC Featherlite Poles

DAC Featherlite poles work to improve a tent's strength-to-weight ratio as they are 15% lighter than other aluminium poles of similar strength. Pole linkages are based on extrusion rather than glued inserts, eliminating the weakest link in traditional pole design.

Hub-Warped Design

The hub-warped variable-diameter pole system creates steep walls (and thus more interior space) at the same time as shaving off excess weight. With the integrated frame and external pole clips, set up is fast and simple.

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PU/SIL/Polyester flies with built-in vestibules, these tents are absolutely weatherproof and offer full storm protection.

IN KEEPING with Black Diamond tradition, our Doublelight tents are created from a sophisticated blend of advanced materials, innovative designs and leading construction technologies, whilst maintaining an old-fashioned simplicity and ease of use.

By incorporating dual coatings on UV resistant, hydrophobic fabrics and polyurethane taped seams for waterproofness, our tents put a protective barrier between you and nature. At the same time, their multiple configurations provide the flexibility to enjoy the best of being out of doors. The speed and ease of pitching will take the chore out setting up, whilst mesh architecture lets the fresh air flow.

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Mesa

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Minimum weight: 2.08 kg
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Area: 3 m² (vestibule 0.8 m² + 0.8 m²)



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Lightweight, three-person, double-wall versatility for basecamp, backpacking or car camping. Large floor plan, high ceiling and speedy set up.

Minimum weight: 2.7 kg
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Area: 4.7 m² (vestibule: 0.8 m² + 0.8 m²)



Mirage **NEW**

Strong and lightweight two-person version of the Oasis. Large front opening and generous single vestibule.

Minimum weight: 1.8 kg
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Area 2.8 m² (vestibule 0.93 m²)



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